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Sara/Hannah: The Gift of Life

The story of Sara Matuson Rigler's survival when caught in the catastrophe of the Holocaust, how she was saved by ten British Prisoners of War whose compassion matched her courage and how she kept her promise to her brutally murdered family to remember and honor them by doing good in the world.

As told to

Hanita Blumfield

Hannah/Sara: The Gift of Life

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Sara/Hannah: The Gift of Life

Introduction:

The word survivor is used is many contexts-surviving illnesses, personal setbacks, career disappointments, and failed family relationships. When it is used to refer to the Holocaust it takes on a totally different meaning. The darkness that fell on a segment of humanity from 1939-45 is unique in all human experience. Never before had a people been singled out for total annihilation simply because they existed. They were to be exterminated, wiped out of living memory, and brutalized so terribly that the word sadism does not even express the evil experienced by the Jews of Europe at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators.

To survive this catastrophe, the Shoah, was (and continues to be) an act of great resilience, indomitable courage and yes-even luck. This is the story of one survivor. She entered this hell as a child who had experienced the love within a family, rivalry with an older sister while vying for parental affection, and all the mundane charms of a normal life. She emerged physically weak but spiritually determined to keep the memory of her family and her people alive. And she is a living testimonial to the strength and perseverance that reside in ordinary people that lets them do extraordinary deeds.

Sara/Hannah Matuson's life denies Hitler his victory over her people - for not only does she survive - she continues her family's legacy by creating a new productive life with her husband Bill and children Gail and Lionel. She enters a helping profession (nursing) and later the political arena as her commitment to Tikkun Olam, the right ordering of the world.

Her story has a number of intertwined characteristics: risk taking, resilience, intelligence, courage and the crucial element of being able to act when luck makes survival a possibility.

This true story is one where despair gives way to optimism and death to life-life in its corporeal sense and life as remembrance.

Prologue

> *"They came straggling through the bitter cold, about 300 of them. limping. dragging footsteps, slipping and falling, to rise and stagger under the blows of the guards - S.S. Swine. Crying loudly for bread, screaming for food, 300 matted haired, filthy objects that had once been Jewesses..."(Willy's diary, January 26, 1945)*

We were two sisters growing up in Shavel, Lithuania before WWII. My sister had blue eyes and black hair and resembled my mother who was a very beautiful woman. I had hazel eyes and brown hair (not as dramatic). My sister was graceful and feminine and my mother used to say how beautiful she was. I, by contrast, was so skinny that my mother thought that maybe I had a tapeworm and it was eating me.

My sister, Hannah, 3 years older than me, had been born in Palestine and she had an aura of the unusual and special because of her birthplace and because she had embodied my parent's dream of settling in Tel Aviv. My parents returned to Lithuania in response to my grandmother's pleas. She had given birth to 8 boys and was heard to say that she would continue to have children until she had a girl. She was lonely for her only daughter and wanted her to come back.

I felt I could never be as perfect as Hannah or as loved by my mother. Mother used to dress me up in white woolen pants and a sweater, but by the time she would come down, I would be sitting in a puddle playing with water or finding another way to spoil my outfit. I have a picture of both of us in the forest in Bubje and I look like a disheveled child with one sock up and one sock down while my sister was as pristine as ever.

I craved approval and affection and never seemed to get enough as I do not ever remember mother hugging me or telling me she loved me - and yet she must have done so. I know that she very much wanted to have a son and so in my own way, I tried to earn her love by being the boy of the family, disheveled and mischievous. I excelled in all sports and was a very good ballplayer. I remember that Mr. Schwartz, who lived on the first floor of

our apartment building, used to call to my mother," Mrs. Matuson, send down the boy, I need a good ballplayer."

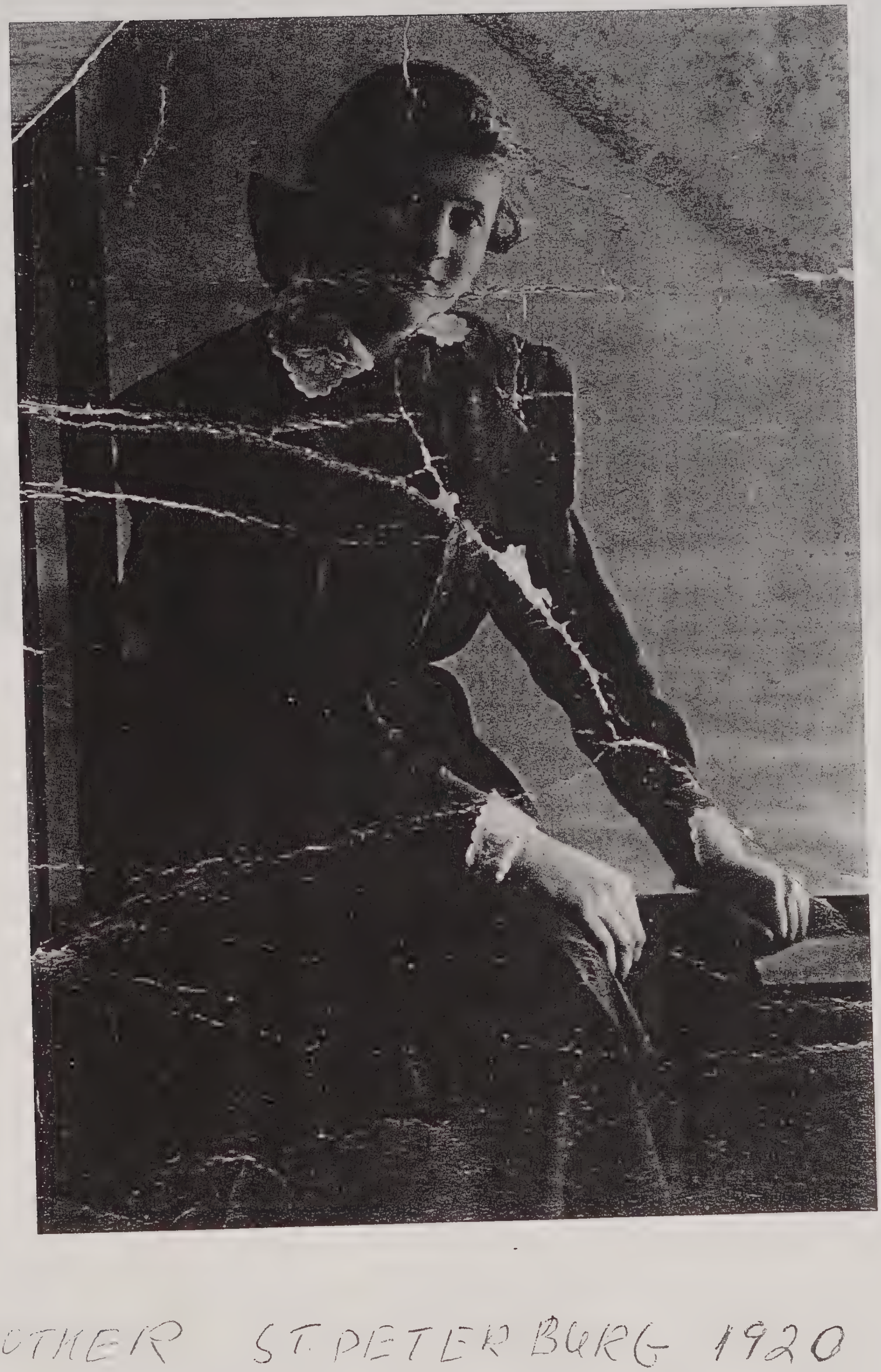
We were a normal family. My mother and sister formed one cornerstone, my father and I the other. Often we play assigned roles in a family even though we did not know it at the time. My sister, feminine and shy, was my mother's favorite and I, tomboyish and spirited, gravitated to my father.
There were other players in the family drama such as my cousin Luiba, considered the most beautiful girl in the town. She was a favorite of my father. When I used to ask him," who do you love more, Luiba or me?" He would say, "I love you both equally." I was unhappy that my father did not love me, his daughter, more than a niece.

Now that I look back father spent a great deal of time with me. My father had a warehouse for goods manufactured in his factory. I used to stop there and show him my grades, which were uniformly excellent except in behavior. We took long walks on Saturday, played mathematical games and he gave me lessons on how leather was processed. But I was just a child and my parents were my whole universe and I desperately needed to find my place in this family of beautiful people especially as I saw my sister as lovely and special and myself as awkward, a "meeskite" (my mother's pet name for me).

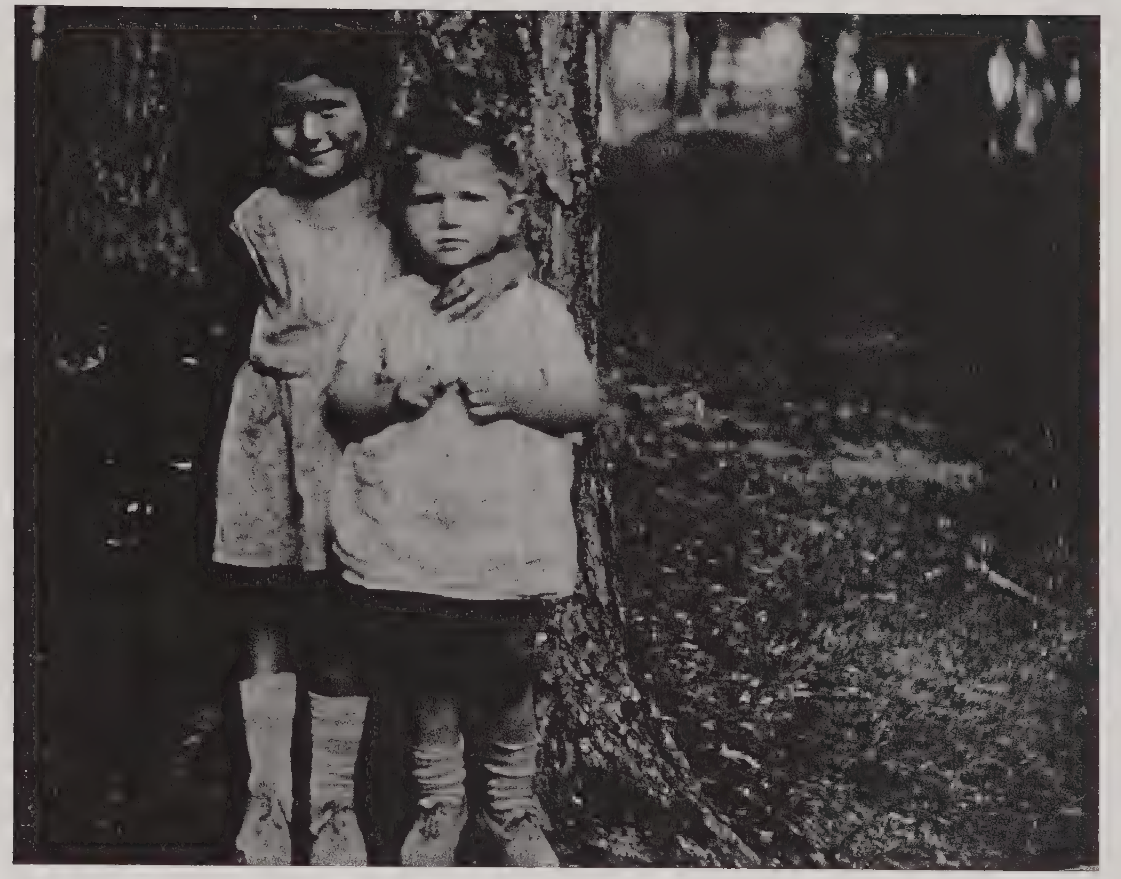
I remember the room I shared with my sister. It had two white beds, a long white table with chairs to do homework and a white chifferobe. The room connected to my parent's room, which had night tables, and I was always curious about their contents. Once I found what I thought were balloons and blew them up but my parents never said anything.

I remember fighting with my sister, jealous that she had many friends. I always interrupted their playing and sometimes they took my arms and legs and bodily threw me out of the room.

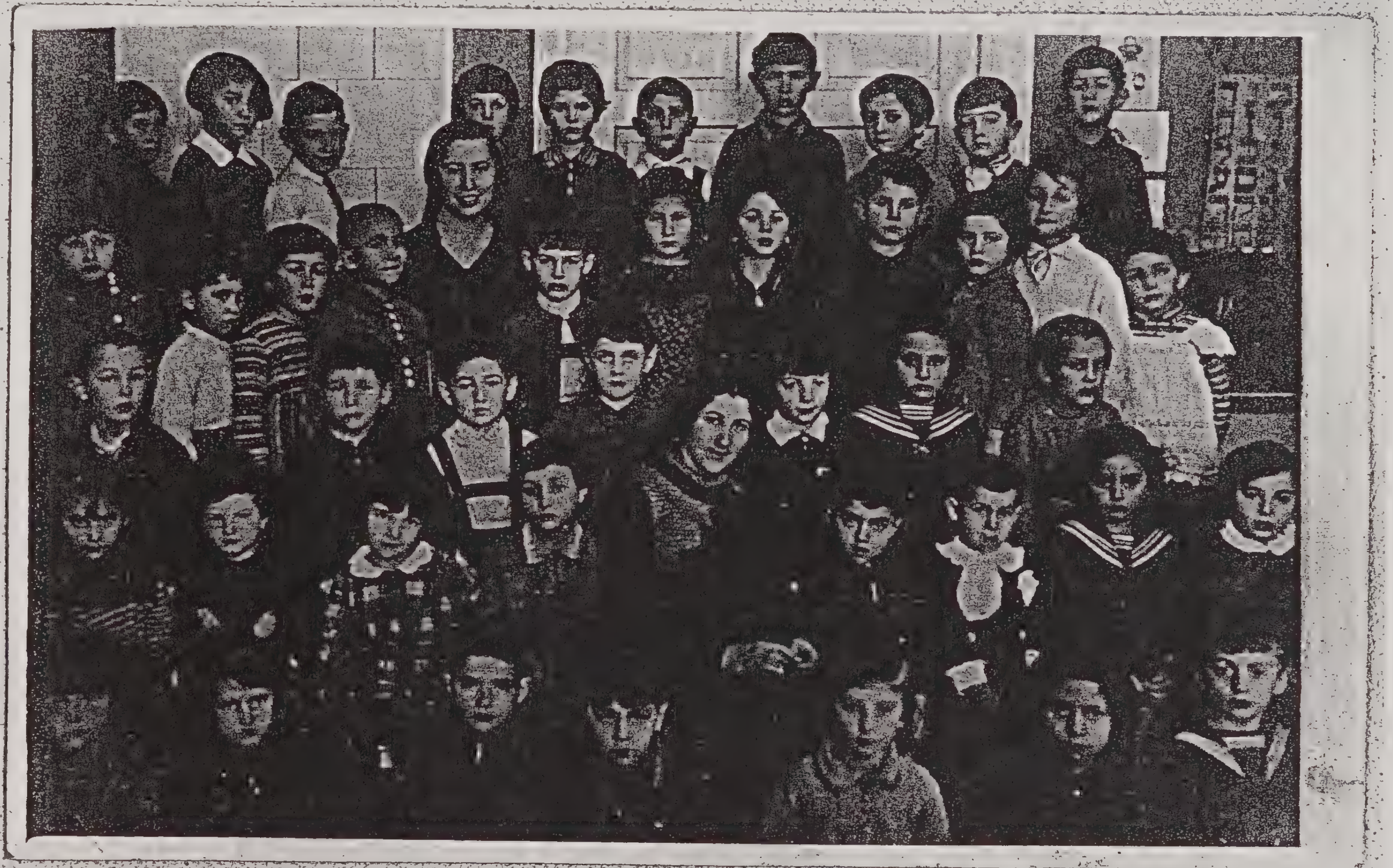
We were two sisters growing up in Shavel, Lithuania. We lived in a beautiful apartment and had a garden where I grew sunflowers and vegetables. I have a picture of myself as a young girl with a big sunflower - opening to the sky. I knew, underneath it all, that I was loved and that one day, I too would dance with the boys like my sister.



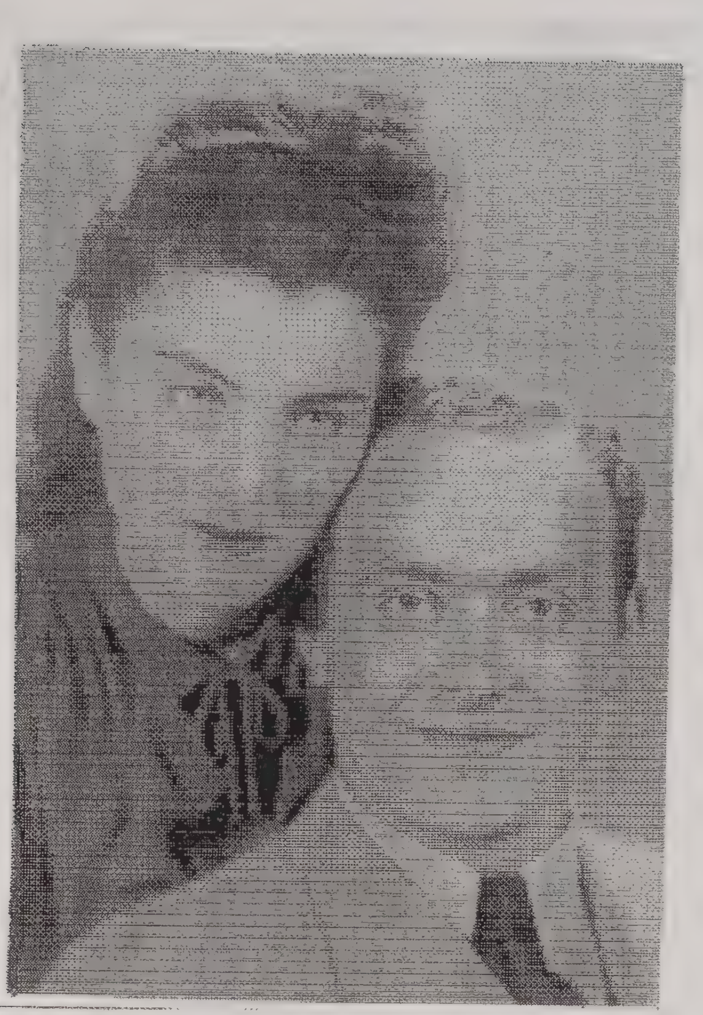
MOTHER ST. PETERBURG 1920
RUSSIA



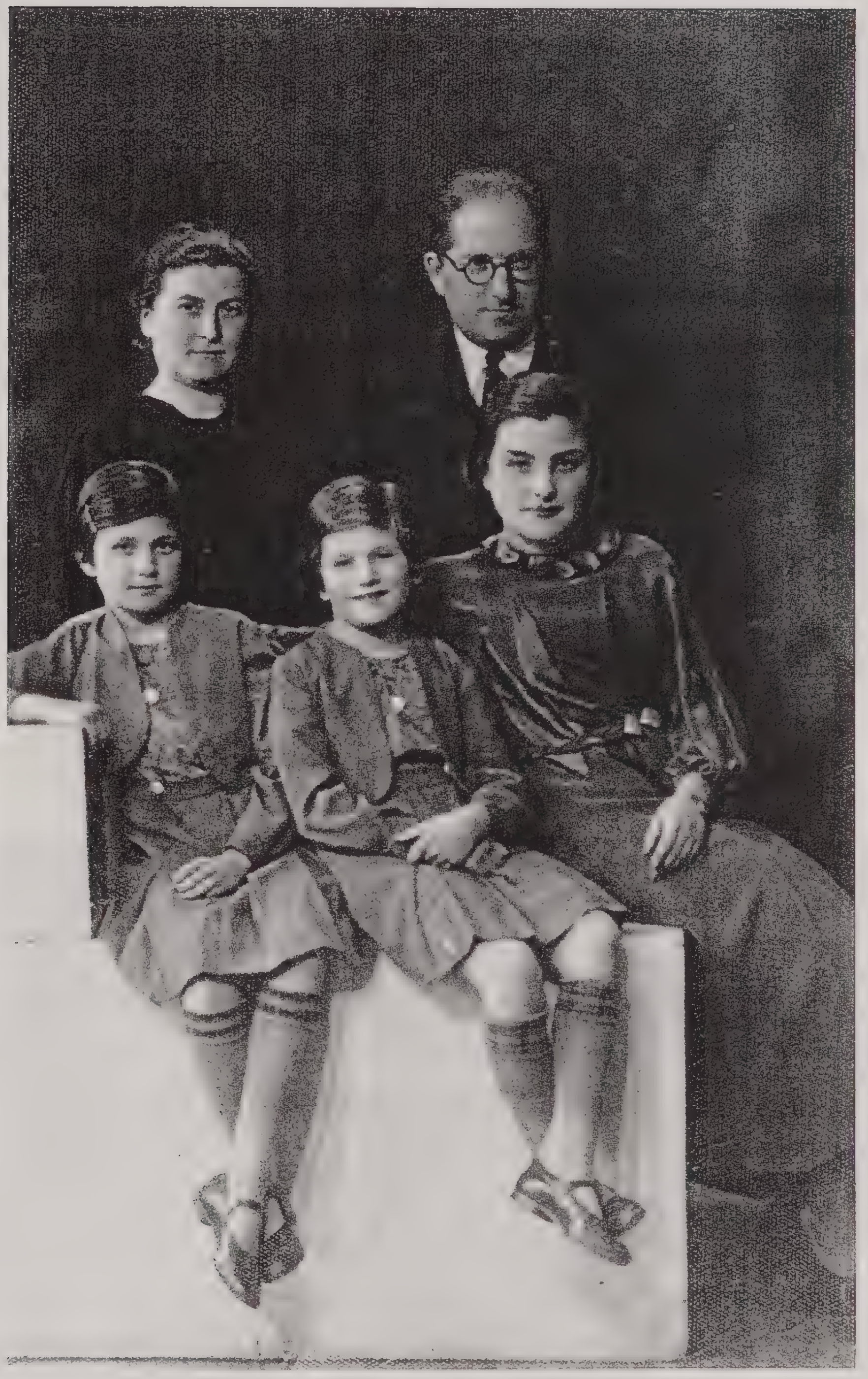
HANNAH + ME IN BURTE-LITHUANIA



1932 - OUR KINDERGARDEN CLASS



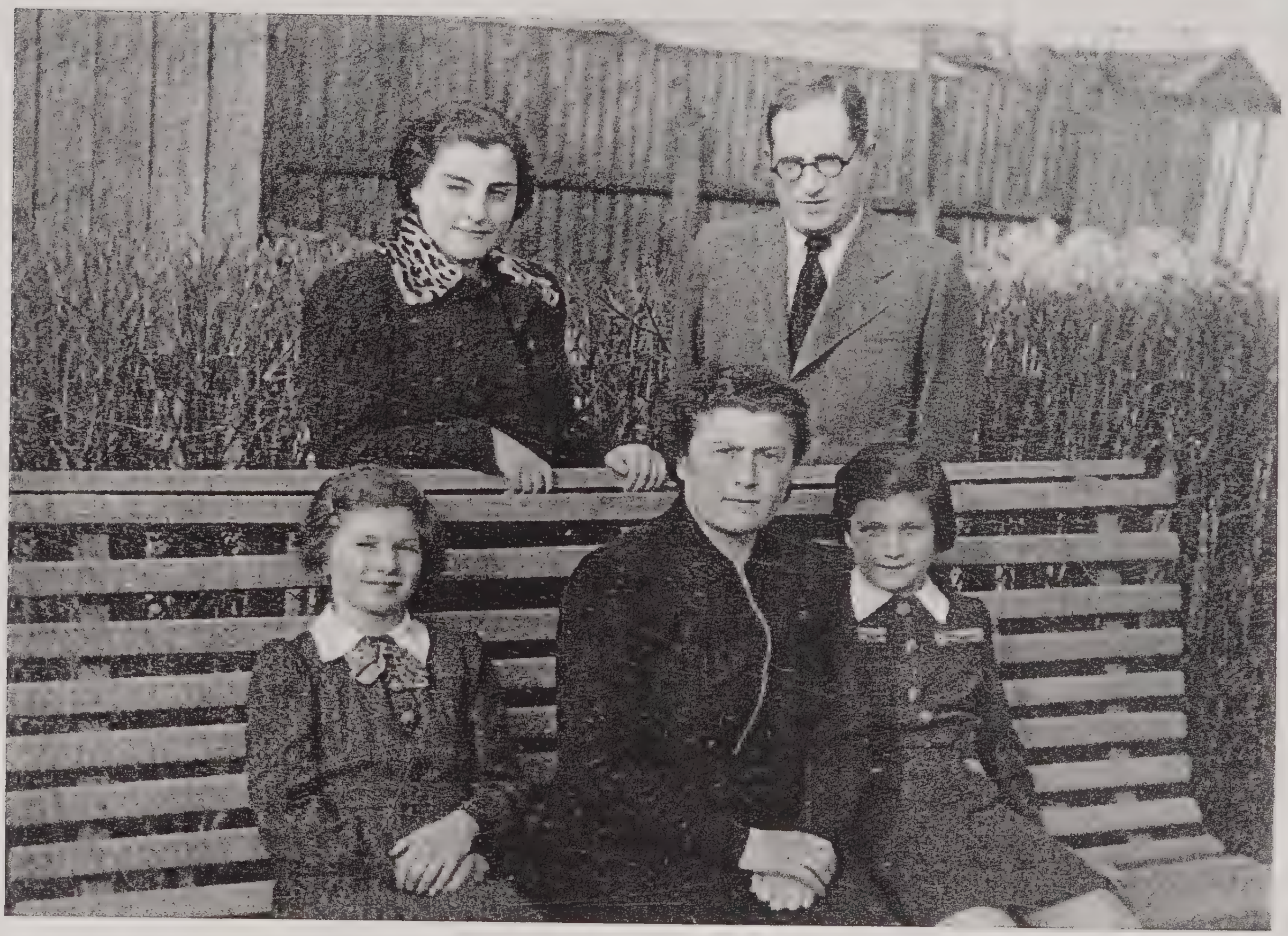
LIUBA AND BENJAMIN 1940 -
KOUNO, LITHUANIA

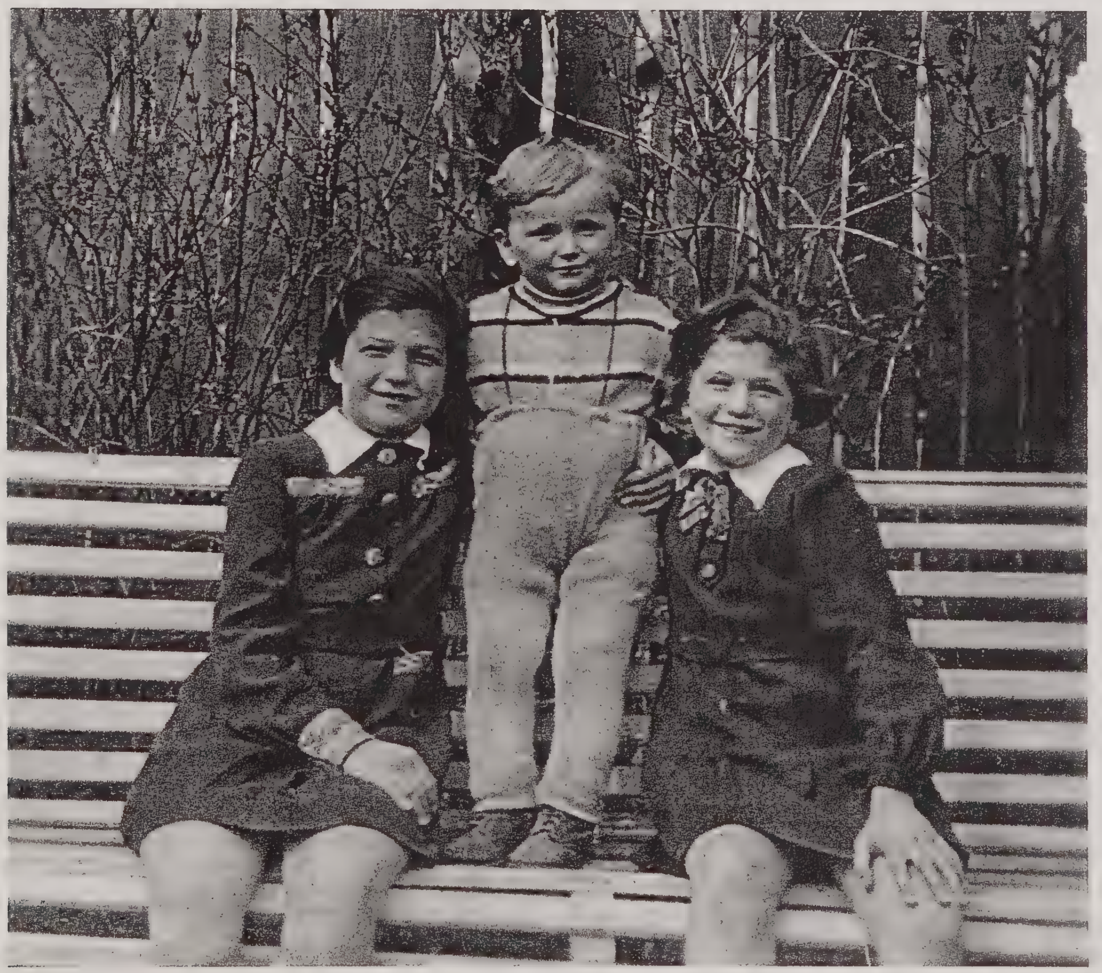


1938 ŠIAULIAI, LITHUANIA

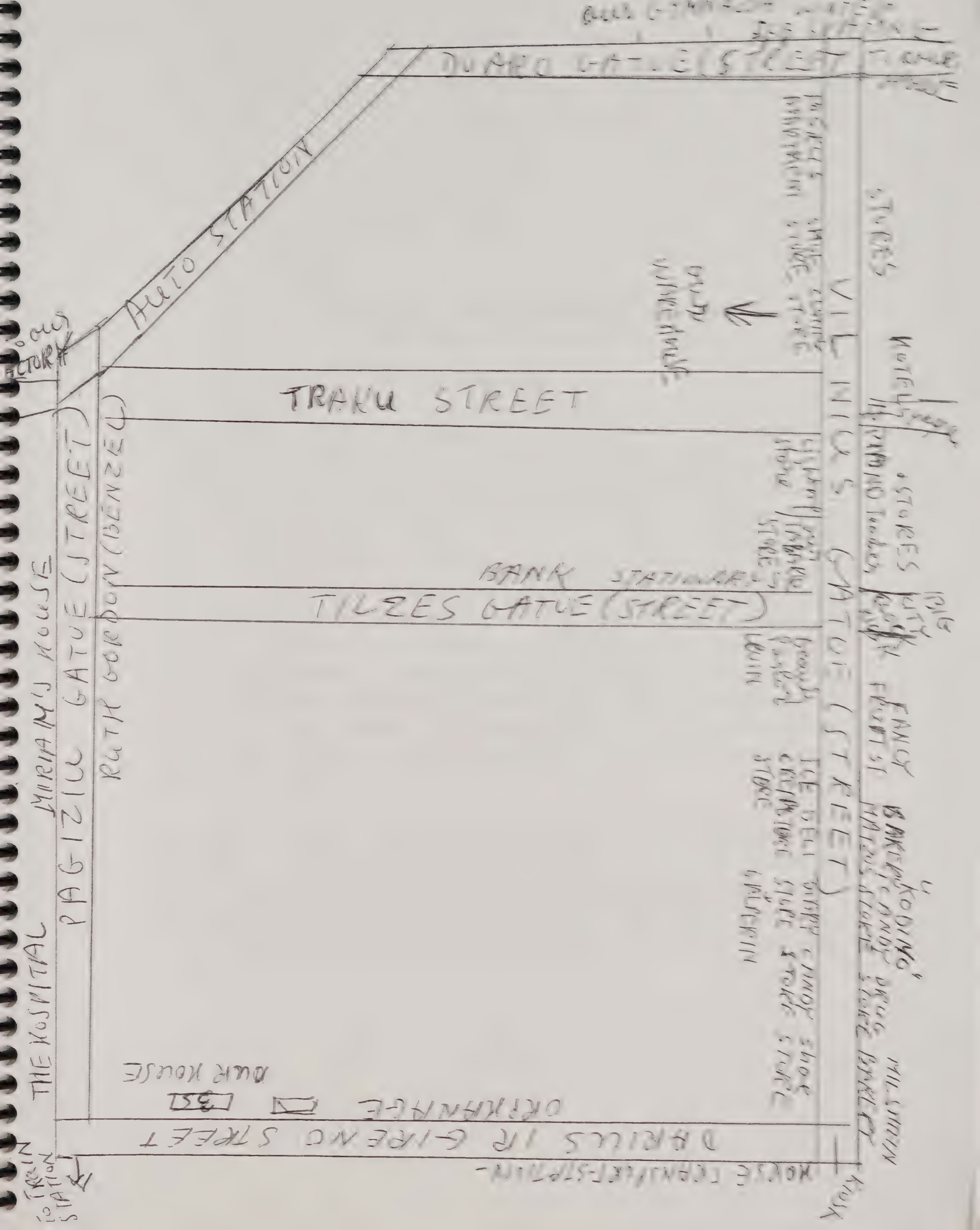
MOTHER, FATHER
HANNAH, SARA, LIUBA

1939 - SHAVEL - LITHUANIA - IN OUR GARDEN
LIUBA, FATHER, SARA, MOTHER, HANNAH





HANNAH, IZZI, SARA


TRAKU STREET
TILZES GATVE (STREET)
BANK
STATIONARY
AUTO STATION
DUKRO GATVE (STREET)
VILNIAUS GATVE (STREET)
STORES
HOTEL
STORES
FANCY FRUIT ST
BAKERY KODINO
CANDY DRUG
MATAUS STORE STORE
MILSTEIN BAKERY
ICE DELI CANDY SHOE
CREAM STORE STORE STORE
STORE
GALPERIN
LEVIN
PAGIZIU GATVE (STREET)
MIRIAM'S HOUSE
RUTH GORDON (BENZEL)
THE HOSPITAL
FACTORY
TO TRAIN STATION
DARIUS IR GIRENO STREET
ORPHANAGE
35
OUR HOUSE
KIOSK

Chapter 1 - The Geography of my Heart

"When I think about it, it was a very nice life"

Landmarks

When I think back to the geography of my childhood, the streets and markers of my memories are very clear, even today. Places where my friends lived, places that I visited on my way to and from school, and places that provided the landmarks of my life such as the Gymnasia (private school) and my father's factory are vivid and compelling. We lived on Darius ir Gireno Street, number 35. Our house was very luxurious. One of its beauties was a balcony outside of the dining room, overlooking the tree- lined street. It had two bedrooms, dining and living room, kitchen, large bathroom, maid's room and a sleeper in the dining room for guests. The placement of the sleeper in the dining area was an indication of how vital and central to the family's conviviality this room was. I also remember the large Samovar of shining brass in the corner – tea was always steeping and ready for a cup and a chat with family and friends.

I especially loved our big garden where I used to grow vegetables and sunflowers. I have a picture of myself as a little girl holding an enormous sunflower, which in my eyes almost reached the sky. But I also understood sadness and loneliness. Before you reached our home, there was an orphanage and my heart went out to the children who were

alone in the world. I could not imagine that soon I too would suffer such a grievous loss and become an orphan very alone in the world.

In this walking tour of memory, when I turned to the right, I passed a large hospital and then turned onto Pagiziu Street, the home of my good friend Miriam, and of Hannah's friend Ruthie. Moving onward on Pagiziu Street, past the auto station, I would come to the ice-skating rink and the Gymnazia (Hebrew Academy). The Gymnazia was an imposing structure four stories high, which to a child's eye seemed very formidable.

The Gymnazia especially helped form my character- I was a very good student except in behavior where I sometimes got a 5 minus- and yet the unwillingness to bend to authority proved life saving later on. In addition, the Jewish community also had a Talmud Torah (Hebrew School) and a Folkschule (Yiddish School). Our schools were excellent and as a good student, I received considerable attention from the teachers.

On Vilnius Street there was Poshkus's new apartment building which my father had helped finance by lending the builder money. Unfortunately, it had been built cheaply and my father warned me that it could collapse. Needless to say, I would run rapidly by as I certainly did not want to be surrounded by rubble. On a more pleasant note, there were many stores to feed every food urge -candy, ice cream, fancy fruit, bakery and delicatessen. It was also the gateway to the beautiful Synagogue where our spiritual and communal life was nurtured and developed. I was especially proud that as the "boy" of the family I sat with my father rather than with the women and girls upstairs, as was the custom.

As I continue on this tour of my childhood one of my favorite places was a large park famous for its chestnut trees. It had ponds, tennis courts, a bandstand and a lake. In many ways it was the hub of the city, the place where families came together in the late afternoon and where the youngsters played many of the games of childhood.

My neighborhood in Shavel provided geographic riches for its population and particularly its children- parks, specialty stores, sports facilities all on a human scale. On the way to school friends could meet and feel safe and secure in each other's company.

Family

My parents were Lithuanian Jews- my father from the town of Rokishkis and my mother from Anyksht. A matchmaker introduced the families and arranged their marriage. My father, Samuel Leib, was a businessman who came from a financially well off family. My mother, Gita, was very beautiful (my sister resembled her). She was also highly educated and had graduated from college in St. Petersburg where she studied languages and literature.

She was the youngest of eight siblings all of whom were boys. This would prove to have fateful consequences in that her own mother pleaded with her to come back to Lithuania after the young couple had immigrated to Palestine. But I am getting ahead of my life story.

Considering their financial stability and good life, my parents were very adventurous for their time (or perhaps for any time). They married in 1924 and traveled around the world for their honeymoon. They decided to settle in Palestine and bought a large house that is still standing today next to the modern Shalom Towers. One of their neighbors was the writer Chaim Nachman Bialik. He dedicated a book of poetry in Hebrew,to my mother and she cherished the volume in our home in Shavel. I remember the color of the volume- it was maroon in color; of large size and my mother read it frequently.

My sister, Hannah was born in Tel Aviv and I believe that, for my mother, she personified the dreams of a young couple building a new life in a new land. Ethel Kutasov, my grandmother, was very unhappy as she

had given birth to eight sons and wanted a daughter. Family lore had it that she said she would continue having children until she had a girl and even after my mother was born her parents kept it a secret for a whole month in order not to tempt the "evil eye". So, it is no wonder that she was lonely for her only daughter and asked her to return to Lithuania.

Loyalty and obedience to a parent was part of the culture of the time and my mother left her young dreams behind as she returned with six-month-old Hannah and settled in Shavel. She came without my father, as he was ill and remained in Tel Aviv for several months. Sometimes I marvel at the courage it took to travel that long distance with a small child. Afterwards my father came back to Shavel (he had traveled on a sinking ship which might, in hindsight, be interpreted, as the future sinking of their dreams).

Mother and Me

I was born in a less exotic environment on November 21, 1928 and never felt that I had the bond that Hannah did with my mother. Perhaps that is why I tried so hard to gain her attention, often by being wild in sharp contrast to my beautiful but docile sister.

Mother used to dress me up in white woolen long pants and a sweater and send me down to wait for her - it did not take me long to find the puddle that would ruin my clothes. There are many incidents in my childhood in which I felt my mother turned away from me. For example, I used to wait for her outside the bathroom. She told me to go and play with my friends and that she was not my friend she was my parent. Today, a remark such as this would not cause unhappiness, but to a sensitive insecure child longing for her mother's love and approval, the seeming rejection cut deep. And yet, thinking back, when I had jaundice, my mother let me play with her gold chains and other jewelry

(the very jewelry that my uncle Mane buried beneath his house in Anyksht only to find that it had disappeared during the war.)

My relationship with my mother was complicated and at that time, my father became my parent of choice. After school I would go to his warehouse and show him my grades. We used to play mathematical games on Saturday after synagogue. We had lunch and he told me stories about his youth and the Russian occupation of his town. Jews were not allowed to move from town to town and when he hid in a wagon of hay, the Russians speared the hay and one of his fingers bore a scar. The Cossacks, during one of the pogroms killed his father as he defended him and so my father was always afraid of the Russians.

When we went off on summer vacation, father was uncomfortable sleeping alone in our home and so we hired a man to sleep over. Because of these experiences he hated the Russians and later thought that the Germans could not be worse - another fateful miscalculation that would ultimately lead to disaster and death.

Father and Me

As an entrepreneur, my father became a jobber in the cigarette business. He was also a partner in a store selling felt boots and galoshes. Later my father and my mother's brother, Meyer, opened a leather factory called Progress. My sister and I received beautiful blue leather boots lined with red as well as navy blue leather coats lined with gray flannel. I kept the boots and coat with me until the time the Germans confiscated them at Stutthof - robbing me of yet another treasured piece of my father's legacy.

In spite of my adoration of my father, I have come to believe that he was not able to forecast what the next year would do to his business. Jewish refugees from Poland had come to our town and told of the

atrocities inflicted by the Germans who had occupied Poland. And yet my father went to Hamburg in 1939 to buy a very expensive machine for the leather factory. Perhaps he, like so many others, was in denial as to the horrendous world the Jews of Europe were about to enter.

I felt a special affinity with my father and was jealous of his love for other members of the family. My cousin Liuba was considered the most beautiful girl in Lithuania (at least by the Jews and that was the only community I knew.) Liuba, before my father married, used to sit on my father's lap and feed him pieces of food. I once asked my father whom he loved best; Liuba or me and he responded diplomatically, "I love you both the same". This did not sit well with me for after all I was his daughter. It is amazing that this still bothers me after all these years and after the catastrophe that befell my family and beautiful Liuba.

My father had a way of punishing me through silence and this was devastating as I was so close to him. One incident stands out in my memory. It was a Friday night and only the Sabbath candles were flickering. I yelled boo at my father and scared him. (He was anxious in the dark because of his experience with the Russians). He stopped talking to me and the silence was unbearable. I really don't know if the incident that occurred on the following Sunday was designed to break the silence, but as I returned a notebook which was dirty to the family that sold it to me, I took the many steps of the stairs going down five at a time and wound up putting my hand through the swinging glass doors. I cut myself deeply and my mother took me to the doctor who lived next door and he bandaged the wound with cotton.

I went to play with friends and show off my wound, but in the meantime my mother called my father and he, not feeling comfortable with the treatment, brought me to another physician. He was the most prominent surgeon in town and when he saw the results of the accident told my father that, "He had just found a daughter" as the cut had barely missed the major artery to the heart. We went to the hospital and I

began to scream when I received anesthesia- naturally my father fainted. I gained a great deal of my father's attention, he was talking to me again, though the route was painful and I still bear the scar today.

Friends and School

The memories of childhood, school and friends lost, become increasingly vivid with time. I had started kindergarten at the age of four and attended the Hebrew Gymnasium. I loved school because I was bright and athletic and most of my friends were from our school. The curriculum was rigorous as we went to school every day except Saturday. On the way we would collect our companions and take the shortcut through the bus station. All of us wore uniforms, a brown dress and a black pleated apron and on special occasions we wore white collars and white cuffs. In the summertime the color of the skirt was navy blue worn with a white shirt. I thought we looked wonderful and was so proud of our appearance.

One of my closest friends, Nessie Galperin, lived near my home. Her parents owned a dairy store- I still see, in my minds eye, Mrs. Galperin wearing a heavy coat in the store, which was generally kept very cold, as she worked from dawn to dusk. She was a little woman who made the best pot cheese, had the freshest butter and sold other products that were first quality. Another friend was Mura Edelstein. She was very heavy and unfortunately slow at school. I was slim and very bright- so I would go to her house to help her with her homework.

Thinking back, it is interesting how a casual remark to a child can remain with you. One day her mother said, "Sara you are going to be a very pretty girl because you have dreamy eyes". I walked around for days with my eyes the size of slits and because, I was so hungry for complements, and always felt like a "meeskite"(ugly duckling) in

comparison to my sister, this comment has stayed with me all my life. Mura's father used to give us money to buy French pastries at Milshtein, which was a very special treat.

I not only played with girls but went biking with three boys from my class. We traveled to the airport on a narrow road with steep ravines on either side and turns and twists to the path. I never told my parents how I got the scabs on my knees and elbows and had they known the road we took they would have been horrified. I was living up to my reputation as the "boy" of the family.

What I particularly remember is that, although we had a beautiful apartment, I went to my friend's homes more often, especially Asia because both her parents worked and we could run around the house unhindered in our play. We did play in the back of my apartment where there was a great deal of clay and we all became budding sculptors.

As I mentioned my mother had eight brothers - her oldest brother Elias was 18 years older. Elias, Morris, Joe and Sam went to America and so survived the war. Another brother Meyer married Ida and also lived in Shavel. Their first child Izzy was named after my grandfather Yisroel. My mother adored the child and of course this made me jealous. I used to hit him because I was bigger, stronger and did not want to share my mother's love.

My father's brother Meyer was the parent of the beautiful Liuba. Luiba was absolutely ravishing – she came to Shavel to have her clothes made. If someone else had the same dress she would not wear it. Liuba married but she and her husband did not live long enough to enjoy married life- he was killed early in the war. Tragically, she was killed on the day of liberation when a German threw a grenade into the bunker in which she was hiding (she had been told that the Russians were going to liberate the ghetto within hours.) My memories of Liuba go back to

the vacations we shared in Palangen and to my desire to be like her when I grew older.

Holidays

We lived in a Jewish world. Our holidays were celebrated as a community and each celebration was an event. My mother used to prepare for Passover many weeks before. She took the meaning of the holiday so seriously that we stopped eating bread four days before in order to make sure there was not one crumb left in the house.(on Passover no bread is allowed in the house) Although she had two people to help her, a cleaning woman and a cook, mother worked very hard herself. The dishes and other utensils were brought down from the attic and once a year we welcomed their familiar patterns and regal loveliness. I went with Marita, our live in help, to the public baths to kosher the utensils for Passover. It was so normal to cross the street with our items for the Jewish Holidays and I was proud of my participation in a wondrous event.

Our Passover table was exquisite. It was set with white china with royal blue and gold borders. The tablecloth and napkins were made of white fabric and starched so that they fell exactly right in folds over the table. The many goblets were of sterling silver and lent an air of both tradition and sophistication to the wonder of the meal.

I, though struck by the special quality of the table, was more interested in the Passover custom of finding the Affikomen. This was the middle matzo that must be found to end the Seder (Passover meal). The father would hide this matzo and promise the finder a present. Often it was the youngest child who somehow "found "the needed half. I wanted a bicycle and asked my father for one in exchange for the Affikomen and he reluctantly agreed, though fearful for my safety.

Unfortunately, the bicycle was lost to me along with all the other possessions of my childhood.

At Rosh HaShona and Yom kippur we would go home from the Synagogue and look at our shadow. If the shadow were in front of us, it would mean good luck. How innocent this appears today but how seriously we took the prophecy then. Another special, though weekly event was our celebration of Shabbat. On Friday nights peace came to our house. Mother baked challah - put it into the bed and put a large pillow on top. The dough would rise and she would knead it down. This was done two or three times and then she braided it and put the bread in a black pan to bake. My mother used to make an extra Challah for a very poor woman who came on the Friday to pick it up.

My mother lit the candles, which were housed in heirloom sterling candleholders. I thought the glow was unearthly and so exquisite. We had beautiful sterling silver goblets and other precious serving pieces. Each treasured item was carefully housed in its own cloth cover. My mother faithfully cared for her legacy but I would never have the same opportunity. Today, I think of the Holidays as a halcyon time that brought closeness and reverence to our family and bound us forever, generation to generation with our people.

Palangen

When I think back on my childhood, the most precious memories of all are centered on the months of summer, when carefree and sunburned we shared the beauty of the beach and the harmony of a family that loved and cared deeply for each other. My parents were affluent enough to afford a long summer vacation for the family and we used to go to Palangen, a resort on the Baltic Sea. My Uncle Meyer his wife Hinda and daughter Liuba lived in Memel close to Palangan. Liuba spent most of the summer with us and shared a room with my mother during the week. Liuba was almost an adult and mother treated her as a friend.

They had a secret language and shared confidences that I wanted to be a part of, but I was too young.

We did, have a routine that we followed, mother Hannah and me that structured the days of sun and happiness. We would bathe in the sea until noontime (mostly at the nude beaches) and sun ourselves in the dunes. Then we would go to the hotel for a leisurely lunch. After lunch, the big meal of the day, my sister and I would nap as my mother took her solitary walks. We would then meet up with her in the park, eat ice cream and chocolate and listen to an orchestra play lilting tunes. We would walk up to the top of Birutes Mountain and look out on the blue of the sea.

I especially remember the wonderful food that we used to eat for supper, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and smoked flounder that was sold hanging from a string and ready to be pulled down by eager little hands. My mother used to check out the various hotels to see if the food was kosher and the state of cleanliness appropriate. My sister and I took all this care as our due and we would eat, sun, and play without a worry in the world.

There was a bridge that went into the Sea. We would walk on the bridge and observe the vacationers. Not far from the bridge was a nightclub called Payuris. You could get liquor and other kinds of drinks, and there was dancing. Liuba who accompanied us to Palangen went dancing and had many dates. Once she called me in to spill orange juice on a date she wanted to get rid of. I could not wait to grow up and go dancing but my teenage years would not be carefree - they would be a struggle to live and remember a life that would never come again.

Sometimes, as I recall examples of family and community life, I wonder why I felt my mother did not love me enough. She even carried my sister and me to bed after our bath so that we would not have our feet on the cold floor.

Many a night I would slip into my parent's bed so that the things that o bump in the night would not get me.

I used to think that my sister had the most parental love and fun but looking back, I realize that I too was blessed with family, friends and community.

A Day in the Life of Me

I have given you a visual tour of my town of Shaval- the remembrances of a child primed for the journey to adulthood.

My day began with getting dressed, eating breakfast, collecting my books and leaving for school-I actually liked school; I enjoyed the routine, the teachers, and of course learning new things-I was thirsty for knowledge. It helped that I was a very good student and was recognized as such. The teachers marked us daily in our special book (the yoman), and I shared it with my father on the way back from school. I also liked gym, where I excelled, and was on the "show group", the only one from the lower classes. I cherished the attention that came from being "special". I was artistic and knew how to sew. I had made a large bag for Mrs. Penn, my aunt's mother. She told me that the present would "outlast us all." How prophetic those words turned out to be.

After coming home, and showing my father my marks for that day, I did my homework, played with friends, rode my bike, I was always busy. We then ate supper, which was always special, discussing the school day - all other matters were always solved at the dinner table. We had tea, and cakes, listened to gypsy music from Sofia on our radio. It was a very comfortable structured life-we knew what to expect, what to do and what our life would be as we grew up. I wanted to be a doctor, so that I could retain my family name of Matuson.

Friday evening was movie night, but we had to get the tickets before sundown, as we could not handle money on Friday eve. If it was an adult movie, children under sixteen were not allowed and my cousin Liuba, would buy the tickets for us. We would stay in the balcony so as not to be seen. Many times I didn't understand the content, as they were adult movies, but my cousin promised to explain it to me when I got older. She never lived to see that day.

Chapter 2- The Darkness Begins

"Father said the Germans couldn't be worse than the Russians."

The charmed life of my childhood was coming to a close – though in 1940,my family and I did not know the worst. The Russians came to Lithuania and within a few weeks nationalized our factory. Although as a child, I did not really understand what this meant, but I could see that life was changing.

My father's status diminished – he was no longer the employer in charge of the fate of the factory. The foods in the stores were not the same as the best products were sent to Russia and we had ersatz coffee and poor quality fruits and vegetables – but we still had food. People were worried about their fates as the communists were powerful and many Russian soldiers were in the town.

We were forced to share our home with a Russian pilot and his family (but more about that later). The greater catastrophe came when my father and uncle were accused of stealing a great deal of leather (50,000 lit) and they arrested both of them. It appeared that the bookkeeper had "cooked the books" to make it seem that my father and uncle had taken an enormous amount. In reality, to steal that much you would need a train to transport it – so clearly the fabrication was to get rid of my father and uncle, without killing them. (The Russians weren't at that stage yet.)

Suddenly I lost the anchor of my life as my whole world collapsed. No more walks on Saturday, no more mathematical games, no more sitting on his lap. I was bereft- all that I had thought was immutable and never changing had toppled. The security that I took for granted was gone. Our income was destroyed as all our money was tied up in the factory. My mother was heartbroken and tried to find a lawyer to get them out of jail. The first trial ended with my father and uncle sentenced to two years in jail. My sister's school class came to the court to lend support- but even the sight of those fresh -faced schoolgirls did not sway the decision to incarcerate my father.

While he was in jail, we used to stay all night outside the prison to give him hard- boiled eggs and matzo for Passover. We were still trying to observe our holidays and since he was kosher, he was unwilling to eat much of the prison food. Later when I saw my father he looked old and broken even though he was only 45. I could not understand how my strong father who I loved fiercely had become a shadow of his former self. It was as if his worst fears had come to pass in that the Russians he dreaded imprisoned him.

It is impossible for a child to comprehend such a disaster and I focused instead on the change in the structure of the schools. I had been proud to go to the Hebrew School and now it was consolidated with the Yiddish School. (of course at this point I could not know that I was fortunate to be going to school at all). To teach Hebrew was forbidden as it was defined as a bourgeois language and Yiddish was mandated as 'the language of the people." The implication was that all of our learning could be turned upside down at the whim of the government. I had been the best student in the class and the teacher came to our home to explain that the honor of being first was going to go to a member of the communist youth movement.

Returning to the situation of my father who was still in jail, The Russians had removed the prison cots and boarded up the windows. The

prisoners were in perpetual darkness and sleeping on the jail cell floor. My mother was told the only way to get them out of jail was to use a communist lawyer. She did so and they were freed but this terrible experience had altered my father to the point where he had lost his initiative and vitality. He also had to sign a paper prohibiting him from talking about his prison experience - if he violated this agreement he would be incarcerated again.

Not only did my father spend time in jail, but we also lost the privacy of our home. A Russian pilot, Alexsey Alexevitz and his wife Zoya occupied our living room. Zoya cooked non- kosher food in our kitchen to the distress of my mother. Eventually Zoya had a baby and her mother came to live in our apartment also. I remember how crowded it felt and how unhappy my mother was. Fortunately, Alexsey was a kind man and I helped teach him German. My mother arranged a tutor for him, a Mr. Parizer. This would prove to be a stroke of luck; he would give us jobs in the ghetto as he had become the head of the Traku ghetto and this helped us survive longer.

The Russians were in Lithuania from 1940-1941. During that time they evacuated whole families to Siberia. One day, Uncle Meyer, Aunt Ida and their three children were taken. We were ready to leave but somehow they did not come for us. Later we found out that the workers in the factory had signed a petition that my father had been a good boss. This was considered a good thing at the time as it prevented the deportation - but later we were to realize this had not been a lucky move after all.

The war between Russia and Germany started on a Sunday, June 6, 1941. We could have run away from the front but my father, given his previous experiences, thought that the Germans would be better and more civilized than the Russians. This was so naïve, when you consider that refugees from Poland, as early as 1939, had told of German

atrocities. Even today, it is amazing to me that my parents did not have a sense of what was happening.

Chapter 3-The Ghettos

"The Yellow Star of David is worn not with pride but in fear"

The war started on Sunday and by Thursday the Germans were in Lithuania. It was so fast that we were unable, at first, to grasp the change. When they came, they started spewing hate against the Jews. We had to wear the differentiating yellow Star of David immediately.

They arrested my father and once again my mother tried to get him out of jail but this time she failed. My father was forced to dig his own grave and then shot (, though I only found out about this in 2000 after visiting Lithuania for the first time since the war). I had been out with my aunt's sister looking for food and when we came back he was gone.

The superintendent of the building had pointed out where the Jewish men lived and they had come for my father, the two rabbis, and other Jewish men. One of the men was my aunt's brother, Lazar Penn who interestingly could have served as a poster for Aryan handsomeness. He was 6ft 6 with blond hair and piercing blue eyes- he spoke perfect German and after the war, I would recognize his picture in photos depicting the fate of incarcerated Jews. He was shown digging his own grave like so many other Jews.

I have always wondered why the Nazis had chosen to use in their propaganda pictures and records, a man who was the direct opposite of the stereotype of Jew that they promulgated on the public. Perhaps it

was their determination to cure the' cancer' of Judaism even if it meant violating their standards of the perfect Aryan man. But I digress and must return to my emotions of fright and fear when once more my gentle father is sent to prison- this time for being Jewish.

We blamed ourselves for leaving my father in the house - we thought that maybe we could have hidden him or done something - but I was a child and could not, at that time, save him. Perhaps it was at that moment, I decided to become the family's savior and help my mother and sister to make it through this terrible time.

The Germans took over our living room and installed a man who looked like Hitler. People used to say that "Hitler is living in Matuzon"s house." He promised to get our father out of prison but we waited to no avail. While we were trying unsuccessfully to free my father, ghettos were being formed in Traku and Kavkaz. And they closed rapidly due to the amount of Jews that were to inhabit this small area. The ghettos were in very poor parts of towns with small houses and no bathrooms. The people living there were offered the more substantial home of the Jews who in this unwilling exchange, lost all their property and household goods.

Without a man to help us since our father was in prison, we were at a tremendous disadvantage and were very late entering the ghetto. We desperately had to find someone to give us a place or we risked certain death. We knew that those who had not been able to enter were rounded up, put in the Synagogue and sent to Zagar to be killed. One of Hannah's friends, Sonia Berelowitz took us in. For children who had had a beautiful room with white beds, we were now, my mother sister and I attempting to sleep in one narrow cot. I realized we could not fit and so I went to sleep with my friend Mura Edelstein on her couch.

My recollections of this period are very hazy. Without a father or surrogate, we had very little and were at the mercy of others. Mr. M,

the head of the ghetto, kept threatening mother with expulsion to Zagar (notorious for its killing fields). So we did not take this as an idle threat but were fearful of him.

Once again, I have only hazy memories of this terrible time- one incident is very clear, however, the inhabitants of the ghetto had to watch a public hanging of a father who had brought in a bread for his child. They made an example of him and I could not sleep at night without the recalling the terrifying memory. His name was Mazavetsky and he was so brave that he kicked away the chair himself and showed that death with dignity was still possible then.

I suppose we were fortunate to have found shelter but the change in our life's circumstances was very traumatic for a young girl who had memories of sunflowers, school, Palangen and even the loving rivalry with a beautiful sister.

We were starving; my mother and sister did not have work. A woman who slept in Edelstein's kitchen told me she would give me bread if I knitted a dress for her employer. I learned fast and made her a blue dress in a Christmas pattern. Sadly the bread did not last very long and we continued to be hungry. When my mother managed to get some flour and cooked it we pretended it was liver or some other delicacy. I don't remember the Berelowitz's sharing food with us even though they had a garden where they were able to grow potatoes. Only one family, the Kvartofskys made us welcome. The grandfather of the family who had a long white beard sat in the corner and welcomed everybody.

Meyer Matuson, my father's brother and his wife Hinda were also in the ghetto. We could not stay with them as they occupied a part ofanother family's kitchen. By 1943, the Kavkaz ghetto was closed and we were sent to Traku. This time we had two beds in a kitchen near the gate.

In one of life's coincidences, my mother had recommended that Parizer, the head of the ghetto, teach German to the Russian who had lived in our apartment. Because of this, he gave my mother and sister work in a brush factory. I took a greater risk and cleaned house for the head SS officer. This was outside the ghetto and he came for me in the morning and brought me back at night. I did receive food there but it was not enough to bring home to my mother and sister.

I was considered the stronger of the sisters. When my Aunt Hinda died of cancer in the ghetto, I was sent in to wash her body for burial. Looking back, this was an extremely traumatic experience for a young girl of fifteen.

Somehow we all had work and so I felt we were living a life like everyone else- perhaps I had adjusted to this strange reality and considered it was more bearable than the first ghetto. I did not know at the time that my sister had been raped at Kavkaz. Berelowitz had saved his daughter Sonya from this terrible act by sending the drunken guard who demanded a young girl to Hannah. This would have further convinced me that the ghetto we were now in was more bearable.

But then I experienced an incident that sears my consciousness with such pain even today so many years later. The date was November 6, 1943. The SS officer had locked me in the attic and told me to look out the window toward the ghetto because "I would see something beautiful." What I saw was the evacuation of the old and the children. After that we never heard the laughter of a child again.

By 1944, the Russians were bombarding the ghetto and surrounding areas. Sometimes I lay on the floor shaking as the bombs fell. During one of these times, an older boy kissed me to comfort me. I don't know many girls who received their first kiss as the Russians fired on the Germans and the ghetto was caught in the fuselage as well. The ghetto was emptied in July of 1944 and my Uncle Meyer, my mother, sister

and I were all evacuated. Somehow, as long as we were together, I was not frightened but then I had yet to experience the worst of our journey.

My mother acted as if we were going on a trip. She packed our bedding and few possessions. We tried to carry or wear as much as possible- on our feet we wore the leather boots my father had given us, navy blue with a red leather lining. I also had my leather coat with a gray and black flannel lining - reminders of my former life. When I consider the clothes we wore, I am certain that our mother had no idea that we would be marching to our death. It was a very hot July and we carried our bedding and bundles on our back, which added to our discomfort. We also wore layers of clothing so that we would have them when we arrived at our destination.

I somehow envisioned a community a little like Shaval where I would meet up with my friends and resume the life we left behind. I missed my father terribly but optimistically still expected that he would find us and everything would once again be all right in the world. But the reality would be very different. Mother did not complain but she also was not capable of taking action and seemed to follow the lead of others. She said, "what will happen to all the Jews would happen to us too and there was no use fighting." I realized my mother could not adjust to the new reality and would not be able to improve our circumstances - somehow I knew that I would be the one to try to help us survive.

One thousand people fell into an enormous line, tragically nobody ran into the forests and nobody tried to escape. The heat increased- we did not have water and we urinated while walking. Some tried to lap water from a few puddles on the ground. I was very worried about my mother and was afraid that the heat and thirst would be too much for her to endure. I was only fifteen and suffering as well but my body was strong and healthy and my mind focused on staying alive.

Finally we came to a holding place where we leaned on our bundles overnight. As I had feared, my mother fainted and I searched for water for her- I was worried that she was so weakened she might not be able to make the journey. Still I tried to take action while my sister stayed with my mother.

Our journey deeper into hell had begun.

Chapter 4- the Camps

"Only in my dreams do I hear the roar of the wheels, the whistle of the train… and the unbearable confinement of the cattle car".

The Germans pushed and prodded us to the trains with their guns and whips. On the trains, we entered the cars that usually transported cattle; this was a clear signal that we were no longer people but animals subject to slaughter at the whim of the Nazis. The train was filled with as many as 60 people in each car with very little space to move. The metal doors sealed and locked us in as if it were a maximum prison for people with no hope. There was no light. Only one bucket was available for us to relieve ourselves. We tried to close the space up with material to afford a little privacy but this would not last through the entire journey. The smell was overpowering as people not only used the bucket but also became sick on the floors. When I think of my fastidious mother who had checked out hotels for their cleanliness, I realized the immensity of this trauma to her, both emotionally and physically.

Sometimes we were not able to sit on our bundles which we still clung to as if our meager possessions still qualified us as human beings since animals do not carry nor value objects. And we were forced to stand all night one person propping up another in a mad caricature of an acrobatic circus.

We were not in total darkness as there were slivers of windows at the top, which let in some light during the day. We did get some water on the train and a little bread. A couple of times during the journey we stopped and the Germans let us empty the overflowing slop bucket and we were able to briefly go outdoors. I think we journeyed for five days but I don't really remember all the details because the experience was so horrendous that I blocked out the fright and pain in order to survive..

We came to a place called Tiegenhoff (I can still see the sign clearly even after all this time.) and were transferred to open trains, to journey to Stutthof. Since it was night I did not know the name of the place but I knew that it was evil as German guards wearing black uniforms with the death head insignia, met us. They had whips and guns and chased us yelling, "Raus, Raus, Raus." They told us too leave all our possessions on the train and they would send them to us when we were resettled.

It was dark; men and women were separated. People panicked calling for each other so that they could stay together. The Germans hit and shoved and succeeded in separating families. We spent the night sitting on the sand already so traumatized because we did not know what the morning would bring. My mother, sister and I huddled together, our fear was so great that we could not face it and so chose to believe that somehow things would get better. I know, I did not cry because I had no more tears to shed - everything was gone except my mother and sister and I knew I had to cling to them.

My mother still had my father's diamond ring and watch. I do not know where she had hidden them. In what was a totally different world, when my sister and I were still living a charmed life in Shavel, we used to say to her," who is going to get the watch?" My mother would say, "Kinderlach, we will see". We never did see because my mother buried the watch in the sands of Stutthof in an attempt to save her treasures for us. I can still see her sitting bent over putting string around the

watch so that she could find it later. But my greatest treasures, my mother and sister would not be buried but would be thrown into communal pits along with relatives, friends, and even strangers whose one common tie was being Jewish and therefore marked for death.

After the endless night, they made us line up for "showers". We undressed and I had to leave my leather coat and my navy boots behind. (this was my last tangible link to my father). I am told that we were examined internally but once again my memory could not bear it and shut down. I know we were given underpants, a dress and wooden clogs. My dress was of summer weight, striped with a large Red Mogen David on the back. My mother and sister were similarly dressed and for the first time we barely recognized our former selves.

We were shoved into low barracks with straw on the floor and I knew we were in Hell. In the distance we were able to see a mountain of shoes. Especially tragic were the children's shoes - thousands of them. In the ghetto, I had seen the children rounded up and their laughter was no more- now I understood that they were no more.

As a further loss of identity, we were assigned numbers attached to our clothing- mine was 54,384. The numbers were not permanently tattooed on our skin as we now know was the usual practice, because this camp killed the Jews almost on arrival. Our" luck" was different since the Red Cross was coming to inspect the camp and they decided not to exterminate us before this visit. So we were kept alive and continued to be fed one bowl of watery soup and cabbage leaves for three people. We had to return the bowl and the Germans had fun throwing them at us.

Another torment was being forced to stand for many hours (the Appel) while they counted us- this was terrifying. I don't think we knew at the time, that Stutthof was a killing camp and that many were gassed. We had no work during this time, because this was a camp in which Jews

were killed immediately and there was no pretense that this was a real place in which people worked and lived at least a meager life. There was not a shred of human dignity left to us. We were forced to go to the bathroom on cue along with others- the toilets were in the open and stank. If you could not go at that time, or had diarrhea you were forced to defecate where you stood.

After being in the camp for a few weeks, we were taken in small boats to Baumgarten, a work camp, to dig ditches for the German army. We were placed ten people to a tent and were fed a piece of bread and some coffee. We also were allotted a thin blanket and a can for the watery soup and coffee. My mother, sister and I dug with shovels and pickaxes. We tried desperately to avoid being hit. They did not complain but just imagine what had happened to the women who remembered the pristine Sabbath cloth, the golden challahs and the silver candlesticks and other memorabilia now irrevocably destroyed.

The winter was coming and we each received a coat. The type of coat often meant the difference between survival and death. Here our "luck" did not hold out. I received a spring coat, Channele a coat with no lining and my mother just a light cover up. The woman in charge of giving out the coats had come from Shavel. We knew that she was currying favor with the Germans and as a reward had warm clothes and looked well fed. She survived the war and now lives in New York City.

I have never forgiven her for giving us what amounted to a death sentence. I remember her well and she glowed with health a result of collaboration, which gave her not only good food but also a coat with fur collar and black boots. I still see the dimples in her cheeks as she smiled and curried favor with the Germans. As a young girl, cold, hungry and miserable, I looked at this woman and wondered at the choices she was making- how she could turn on her people. And yet it is still very hard to judge the choices made in the depths of hell.

We were shifted to four different camps. The final camp, Torn, had round wooden barracks in which 50 people were jammed when we were not digging ditches. In all these camps we dug foxholes for the enemy. My sister, my mother and I huddled together and felt lucky that we had each other even though we were being starved as we received only some thin soup and, at night, one loaf of bread which had to be sliced for ten people.

We used to dream about bread- I thought paradise would be to have as much bread as I wanted and maybe a boiled potato. Another misery was the lice. We couldn't get rid of them; they feasted on our emaciated dirty bodies. In the evening we would try to delouse each other - the lice were so big that I could hear a crunching noise when we crushed them. There were no toilets only a big pit with wooden rails. I sat on the rails and had a recurring fear that I would fall in. The smell was truly the stench of hell.

December came and it was bitter cold. People exhibited meanness to each other because everyone was trying to survive under conditions that made life impossible. We were suddenly told that we would be evacuated to "save us" from the Russians. And so the final march deeper into Germany began.

I have thought many times about this time in the camps and I find that the memories are buried very deep. I know that there were other people around us but I rarely spoke with them, My mother and sister were the center of my life and all I could do was get through each day with the numbing cold, the ceaseless hunger and the all consuming fear.

A thousand women began to walk in December and a small number of survivors were still walking in January of 1945. It was a" death march" but we did not recognize it as such or imagine its ferocity when we started out because we were living in the moment and death was commonplace.

Chapter 5-The Death March

"I would never let you go by yourself but now....may God be with you. My sister just looked and said nothing."

It was very, very cold -snow shrouded the ground-a precursor of the deaths that were to come to Jewish prisoners who would not even have shrouds to cover their emaciated bodies. It was wet as well as frigid and we had only very thin clothing - by this time mostly rags. Our feet were in clogs, which chaffed the skin and let the dampness in. We tried to put a torn off piece of blanket in the" shoes' but it really did not help. We were filthy not having been allowed to bathe for a long time. Our hair was matted and the lice observable.

We were starving - most of us were trying to survive one step at a time and did not recognize how close to death we were. Our spirits were practically extinguished which is why escape seemed impossible. We had also seen those who tried to flee killed on the spot. Those that remained alive walked for a month from December until January of 1945.

My mother, sister and I seemed to always fall at the end of the line; a few S.S. men guarded us with whips and guns that they enjoyed using on starving, weakened women. We actually did not walk- we dragged ourselves. My mother was only 44 years old but she looked like an old women, all hunched over with frozen hands and hungry. Hannah was shivering with cold and shuffled her feet. She too was terribly hungry and stared out of vacant eyes. The guards kept saying faster, faster and yet we knew that most of us would not reach our destination.

People kept falling and were abandoned. My mother was flagging, she was losing whatever strength she had - I was afraid she would fall down and then the guards would have left her there to die in the snow.

People were dying. I remember that a German gave Ruthie and me a piece of bread to remove Pulia Zilberstein's body. She was one of my friends(her father had been the Assistant Principal of the Hebrew School). This was when we were still allowed to remove the dead. After a while bodies were left where they dropped. We were walking skeletons, trying to eat snow and to find a frozen turnip. Our hunger was so severe that some were willing to risk being shot if they left the line to find anything on the frozen ground.

We dragged ourselves all day and were constantly beaten with guns to make us move faster. At night, they let us into a barn. We all tried to sit down, often on top of each other but mostly there was only room to stand. Our clothes, thin and threadbare, were constantly wet and worst of all we had no place to relieve ourselves. Once we were given the slop that the farmer had prepared for the pigs and all of us grabbed for that mess of potato peels, manure and other offal. I was only fifteen years old though I looked as if I were a walking bundle of rags (later Stan Wells would write in his letter to me that he was surprised the bundle of rags was moving).

There was another incident etched in my memory, even today. A guard offered to save me and take me to his family. I would recognize him as he had kind eyes when the other Germans had only bestiality lurking in their features. He said he could save me because he lived nearby and would take me to his family. I told him that I had a mother and sister. Sadly he could not take three of us and I would not leave my family behind. He felt such sorrow for me that he wanted to at least give me a loaf of bread.

My mother, sister and I, though starving, ate only a small portion and my mother slept on the rest of the bread. During the night, someone stole the precious food. I was in a rage and hit my mother. Now, that I think back, the act of violence appalls me. I was old enough to know that this loss could mean death by starvation but at that moment, it overrode my feelings that to strike a mother was a grievous sin.

My mother was a fatalist. Once when the barn we were in for the night caught fire I begged her to run while we had the chance. My mother responded, "whatever will happen to all the Jews will happen to us too. We are in enemy territory. There is no place to run we have to be together".

I knew that my mother was deteriorating rapidly - her hands were frozen and she needed our help to shift her clothing so she could relieve herself and yet she did not realize the end for her might be near. She had hidden my father's diamond ring and I asked her to give it to me so that I could somehow trade it for bread. When she gave me the ring, she said that in another time she would not have let me go but now there was no choice and she hoped God would watch over me. My sister was silent.

We stopped in a little village, Gross Golemkau, and there was an announcement that we were 26 miles from our destination. Townspeople observed our pain and misery but they did nothing. I knew that I had to take extreme measures to get us food. I decided slip out of the line, risk being shot, exchange the ring for bread and then slip back in. It wasn't a well thought out plan but an act of courage by a daughter who knew her mother and sister would die without food.

I took the ring, slipped out of the line, eluding the guards, and ran into the nearest barn. A boy came in to tend the horses and I asked him for bread in exchange for the ring. Unfortunately he came back with the Police who told me to get back in the line before I sullied their

Judenrein town. The police and other people began to chase me back to the line but I knew that I would be shot in front of all the Jews. I almost did not mind being shot I was so scared- but not in front of my mother and sister. A posse formed with pitchforks, yelling and screaming, and chased me toward the line. To my right, I remember seeing men wearing army coats. I ran between them, hoping to take the posse with me so that I would be killed out of sight of those I loved so dearly. I do not know how I managed to run so fast, hungry, my feet bleeding in the clogs- I know that I looked like a wild animal and certainly, at that moment, felt like one.

I was a filthy, starving bundle of rags, and yet I did not want to die and so was running for my life but also for my mother and sister who still needed my help. There were bystanders who observed this drama as if they were watching a play and clearly did not care that a young girl was starving and brutalized and would soon be murdered. I escaped into another barn and hid in the trough. I had moved so rapidly because as I told you, I did not want my family to see me killed. And yet, suddenly all alone, I understood why my mother had not tried to escape and had clung to the people around her.

I waited for hours for the Germans to find and kill me. Maybe, my father was watching over me- I don't know. During those hours, I agonized about my mother and sister, who were now without hope as they did not have the ring any more and they did not have the bread. I could not even cry as my tears had dried up long ago, but I felt such a heart rendering loneliness and being so young still a strong desire to live to find a way to help my family.

After many hours, a soldier entered the barn. I asked him if he was Polish. He told me he was a British prisoner of war- Stan Wells, and he told me that my captors were no longer looking for me. I could not believe that I had really escaped and that I was, at least for the immediate future, not in danger of being shot. Stan brought me

immediate future, not in danger of being shot. Stan brought me something to eat as he realized that I was near death from starvation. I was so hungry that I devoured the food and later would be sick because my stomach could not digest even a small amount of food. He then tried to figure out a way to save me.

Stan said that there was a Russian girl, Zoya, who worked in the barn- one of a group of forced laborers who were in a camp in town. He thought her group might be willing to take me in. There were also nine other British POW's in a camp at the other end of town and he said he would talk to them about hiding me. Stan told me he would see what could be done, gave me some more provisions, and then he left me in the dark barn alone. Stan said, "May God watch over you".

He had removed the kerosene lamp so that the farmer's wife, Mrs. Miller, would not see me, as he knew she checked the barn to see if the cows were fed and the other animals appropriately cared for. It was so dark and I was so alone that even the cow's breath was a welcome sound.

That night cold and aching in more ways than one, I now almost wished for death. When I was with my mother and sister, huddled together, I had felt the warmth of their bodies and their hearts. Now I had to face this nightmare by myself. My mother's words, "whatever will happen to all the Jews will happen to us" took on a new meaning for me - because the loneliness was almost unbearable.

I even welcomed the cows nibbling at my hair, as I was grateful for the warmth of a living creature, and so I lay there all night.

Thinking back, however, I was at a crossroads, though I did not know it, as Stan and the other British Prisoners of War would save my life at great risk to their own. H e showed me that there was still some good in the world.

Chapter 6- Survival

"We had a good look at her…her eyes are large as is usual with starvation, sunken cheeks, no breasts…"

In the dark barn, I felt someone shaking my leg and touching my clogs, she also yelled, " who is there, who is there?" I lay absolutely still not daring to breathe. She also muttered about the lamp and I was afraid she might come back with another light. At that point I became a fatalist and decided not to move, if I was discovered so be it. She left and did not return that night; she told Stan, in the morning, that she suspected a soldier had been in her barn and wondered if he was still there. How could she imagine that a Jewish escapee was hiding there?

In the morning, Stan returned and I learned that Zoya and the other Russians were not willing to hide a Jewish girl. The English POW's, however, had decided to bring me back to their camp even though the room where they were kept was locked at night and the windows were grated; the rest of the barn housed 10 to 12 horses. On top of the barn there was a hayloft and they had a plan to make a hole in the straw close to the chimney and I would lie in the straw, hidden all day. In the morning when they came to hang up their laundry and at night when they picked it up, they could bring me food without it seeming suspicious.

The waiting for someone to get me late at night felt like an eternity. I was very sick because I had eaten and my stomach could not tolerate the food. The lice were devouring me. I had to relieve myself as I

had diarrhea and went to the area where the cows were stabled. I was cold and shivering and I kept thinking about my mother and my sister and I was very worried about them. I also really did not know if anyone would come for me for after all I had just met Stan and did not even know Willy.

Late at night, Willy, one of the POWs and later the author of a diary about his experiences during the war, came to get me to take me to his comrades. I was terrified, as the reality of my situation had come clear to me during the night I spent alone and vulnerable to capture. Willy covered me with a big army coat and told me to walk behind him. I was so petrified and could not even follow his instructions - but somehow we got there. When we reached their "camp", I was given food, medicine for my ulcerated sores on my legs and kerosene to try and get rid of the lice. Because I had not eaten in such a long time, I ate too rapidly and once again became sick and sought out the horses this time.

Neither Willy nor Stan came to see me again. I didn't understand why at the time but they did send me a kind and gentle substitute, Alan Edwards. I stayed in the hole in the hay in that barn for over three weeks. Lying in the straw was like lying in a coffin; the days were long and I feared discovery.

I tried to structure my time so that I would not lose my hope and my sanity. In the morning I waited for Alan and my breakfast, I always prepared the straw over the edge so that the stable boy would not have to go far for the horse's feed and inadvertently discover me. I would try to cover myself with the straw as children played hide and seek in the barn and sometimes jumped over me.

In the late afternoon, I waited for Alan and supper. During the time I spent alone, I tried to play mathematical games with myself and I tried to think of ways to find my mother, father and sister when this

nightmare would finally end. I told Alan that I was very lonely and he spent time with me staying the night.

One night, perhaps to comfort me, Alan kissed me in the barn and it reminded me of my first kiss in the ghetto when the bombs were falling. I am certain that most young kisses are not given amid scenes of danger, despair and death and yet the embrace was an affirmation of life, human love and connection. A few times when Alan kissed me, I even got excited and so I decided that I must be normal after all.

Alan brought me a maroon coat, stockings, a pair of shoes and a sweater to go over my dress. My dress had a large Mogen David on the back that no amount of washing could take out- so the sweater was designed to be my disguise. I was very thin. Willy in his diary describes my condition in these words, "we had a good look at her. Her eyes are large as is usual with starvation, sunken cheeks, and no breasts. Hair has not been cut, body badly marked with sores caused by scratching lice bites... feet blue and raw with frostbite, right heel is eaten away by frost and constant rubbing of badly fitting clogs..."

Alan went to see my mother and sister in Praust to see how they were and to try to bring them food. But he could not get in as the camp was quarantined due to an epidemic of typhus.

I stayed in that barn for what seemed to be an eternity. One day Alan decided to have me meet the other nine POWs. Alan took me down by ladder while another person brushed away the footsteps left in the snow. They removed the grates from the windows and pushed me through. Each of the men gave me a small gift- once more I don't remember too much except that the room was large and filled with beds. They continued to plan how to hide me if the straw was removed from the barn and the horses transported. They were prepared to create a double wall and put me inside. But this plan was never put into effect because they were evacuated.

After three weeks, Alan told me that the Russians were close to Gross Golemkau; he and the others were to be evacuated immediately. He offered to take me with them in place of Stan who had opted to stay behind. By shaving my head and disguising me as a boy, they hoped to save me. I was afraid this would not work and that I would be found out, jeopardizing all of their lives. So, alternatively, Alan arranged for a man to pick me up during the night and take me to the farm where there was an extra bed in the attic room. He had told the man that I was a Lithuanian girl who he had been hiding.

That night the British POW's went away, among them Alan Edwards. I was miserable as I was so attached to him and believed that he was the love of my life. They left, my surrogate family, I was so terribly lonesome and I remembered my mother's words, "Whatever happened to all of the Jews would happen to us." I wished myself dead- but I was still alive and missing my mother dreadfully.

That night I was in agony. I did not know if anyone would come for me. I did not know how to camouflage myself since the horses and the straw were being shipped out of the barn. Finally, it was morning and I knew that I had to leave the barn. I simply began to walk. No policemen stopped me even though the Police Station was right there and the man who was to collect the horses passed me on the road. The chances of actually being free were so miniscule and yet it happened. Somehow, I found my way to the very barn where Stan had worked. My father may have guided my steps because without knowing where they were, I had found Zoya. I told Zoya that my name was Sonia and she agreed to take me to the Russian compound. She did not recognize me as in three weeks I had begun to look more human, even normal.

I however, had second thoughts and instead decided to look for work. I looked around and chose the most imposing house made of red brick and knocked on the door. A man answered and when I said I wanted

employment he asked if I could milk cows and feed pigs. I thought how strange to feed the pigs this girl from Shavel whose mother had inspected all the food to make sure it was kosher. But I said of course I could and was hired.

I told the farmer, whose name was Heinrich Binder that I was a Lithuanian refugee named Sonia and needed work and a place to sleep. He said he had an empty bed in the attic and was willing to give it to me. I went back to Zoya and told her that I would not be coming with her but would work for Heinrich Binder. When I returned to his house, he put me to work in the cellar sorting the potatoes.

Then he came down to me and told me that he did not believe I was Lithuanian because my German was too "perfect". He said that he thought I was the Jewish girl who had escaped three weeks before. I looked around and there was no one else in the room so I thought if I tell him what would he do- kill me. I told him that his accusation could be a death sentence for me as I was Jewish.

He remarked that under other circumstances he would have turned me in but now he saw a way to save his own skin by helping me as he was highly placed in the SS. He decided to curry favor with the allies who were close to liberating the town and let me live if I wrote a card in Yiddish stating that he had saved my life. Binder was looking for safe passage to join his wife in Colon, which was soon to be under the control of the British. I wrote something and he, in turn, let me stay in the attic in one of the beds (the other bed was occupied by the very person who had failed to come for me in the barn as he had overslept).

Can you imagine my shock when I realized that I had come to the very farm where Alan had been. There was a girl named Annie who also worked there. She confided in me and told me about her family and home and yet she said to me," you know Sonia, we lost the war but we did win the war against the Jews. We killed them all". I could not

believe, even after what I had seen and endured, that a young girl of fifteen had such a hatred for a people she had never had contact with. I did not tell her I was Jewish and somehow I had to act as if what she said was perfectly normal. We even went to town together in Binder's Horse and Buggy and some people called us " the Binder Girls"- what an irony- a Jewish girl and one who hated Jews without knowing any.

It was known that Binder was well to do and for that reason high ranking German officials, political and military, stayed with him and ate meals at his home. Sometimes when I served them, I was forced to talk with them. It was very difficult for me as I was wearing my sweater over the dress with the Jewish star. The Germans would complement me on my "beautiful eyes" but all I could think was if they discovered my identity I would be shot. I tried to disappear by saying that I had to milk the cows- those cows often did not have another drop to give to keep me safe.

Although I tried to do my chores and stay out of his way, Binder's father, used to chase me. He was wheelchair- bound but this infirmity did not stop him. It is, in retrospect, almost funny that I was being chased by an old man in a wheelchair. More important to my survival, was the problem, that the local head of the police became suspicious at my presence. They were beginning to suspect that I was the Jewish escapee. I was fortunate in that it was February and war front was coming our way. Heinrich decided to join his wife in Colon and left the farm in my young hands. He gave me Annie's passport. I am not sure why he was convinced that after the war I would return the property to him. Perhaps he thought me too gullible and innocent to act in a devious manner.

The front kept getting closer and the Germans were running away. They were called the German Fluglingen Refugees. I convinced the Poles who had been forced laborers to stay put until the Allies came. There were twelve of us and we were right in the middle of the front. The

shells were flying, the Germans were vanquished - the Russians had come. I don't know how I forgot my father's admonition that the Russians were at least as bad as the Germans though my father did not live to know that the German's were worse. In any event, I thought I would be liberated and free. I would tell them that I was Jewish and they would marvel at my miraculous survival.

Chapter 7-The Russians Are Coming

"Finally, the Russians came in the morning. Finally I am liberated – I'm free- I'll go find the head of the Russians and tell him I'm Jewish, he'll hug me and kiss me and say you're alive..."

I spoke excellent Russian so I went to the head Russian "liberator" and told him I was a Jewish girl who escaped from a concentration camp. I asked him if there were Jews in this part of the Russian army. He looked at me and said," The Jewish people are behind the front. They don't fight..." Once again, anti-Semitism was rearing it ugly head. The Germans almost annihilated us and the Russians were infected with the same virus.

The "commander" decided to talk with me and took me to a storage room in the basement filled with tables, chairs and chifferobes. They had been placed there to save guard them from bombing raids. Suddenly, he began to chase me, I tried to run away but the room was too small. I kept running in circles with him not far behind. How absurd, I was vaulting over the furniture trying to get away while he kept protesting that he loved me and wanted to marry me. I told him to keep away from me and surprisingly he said okay. Perhaps he finally recognized that I was a young girl and he had second thoughts.

I believe he had some remorse because after a while he sat down and wrote three letters: one to his mother in Moscow, one to his sister in St. Petersburg and the last, "to whom it may concern". The content of all three stated that I was his wife and should be given safe passage.

To this day, I believe that he thought his fantasy would come true and that we would eventually marry. He had his attaché accompany me away from the front but I did not want to remain with him and so once again I began to run dodging the bombs and the artillery fire. He kept telling me to keep out of the range of the bullets but I just kept on running. He, however, was hit and died on the spot.

I went further into Poland and came to a town where I found a Russian office. I showed them my letters and then the farce continued as reality became much stranger than fiction. I was arrested as a German spy. I was kept under guard and interrogated at night. I slept on the floor with six men who had also been arrested. I was guarded all the time and at night the Russians questioned me. I sat at a table in my coat with my heart pounding and the fear making it difficult for me to breathe. I could not believe that I had survived the camps only to be imprisoned by my sought after "liberators". The Russians told me they had witnesses who had worked with me who would attest to my being a spy. Later I found out that part of the reason for the arrest was that I spoke excellent German as well as Russian. The education I was so proud of in Shavel was proving a hindrance at this point.

How could they think I was a spy when I was wearing the dress with the Jewish Star on the back- but they believed it was part of my "disguise". I tried to convince them that I was a Jewish girl and said," I would cut my heart to show you that I am not a spy, I am just a Jewish girl from Lithuania." Eventually, after telling my story over and over they let me go. They still did not believe me and said that nobody could survive what I said had happened to me. But they released me. They showed me where to sleep that night in a space occupied by men. I was wary of them and stayed the whole night in the outhouse. I had endured the war against the Jews by the Germans, the Lithuanians, the Poles and now the Russians-so much for liberation.

To add to my concern and confusion, in the morning the elderly cook told me that these were no longer men but had been reduced to the level of animals. He gave me some food and while I was eating, a door opened and a man asked me to clean his room. I said that I would if he vacated it but he said," I want to marry you". This was getting to be too much and I knew that I had to escape. I walked and walked away from the front, going towards Starograd. There I met up with a Jewish soldier who gave me bread and butter and tea with milk. This was a feast for me. The soldier was in charge of sending mail from the front to the families. As the train was not running from this town he was delivering the mail by truck. He offered to send me by the same truck to the first train stop and then I could go to Lithuania or another destination.

Unfortunately, his being Jewish did not stop him from crawling into bed with me as I tried to sleep in a bombed out building. I was clothed in my dress with the Star of David and my underwear but he still bothered me. I had kept my mother's diamond ring fastened to my underwear with a safety pin and I was worried that he would find it. I was able to stop his amorous advances, as he was not a brutal person, though he did threaten to take away the help he had promised. He pointed to the other bed where a soldier and a Russian woman were engaging in sex and said that she, at least, knew how to treat a soldier. In the end, his better nature surfaced and he sent me and the Russian woman away from the front and toward the next train.

When I arrived at the train stop, I told the station master that I wanted to go to Lithuania. He told me to come to his room where he would show me on the maps where I was and how to get home. There were maps on the table and he showed me how I could travel to Lithuania. But he had other designs. At the other end of the room was a couch - he pushed me onto it and tried to rip off my coat- I started to scream and I punched him. The bad farce continued because a door opened and two Polish people in nightshirts and nightcaps looked

in and said" first the whores came and then they scream". I was incensed and I don't know where I got the strength but I had encountered, by this time, enough of these brutal men and was determined not to let them win.

I went back to the station distraught and a young man asked me if the station- master had tried to rape me. I said yes and he told me he would sit with me all night as protection. In the morning a train came. It was a train for animals fitted with shelves. This one was not taking me to my death but I hoped back to my life. Fortunately, I met a Jewish girl, Sonia as well as a Polish girl, Anna. We decided to travel together as there would be more safety in numbers. I was so glad to find another Jewish girl as I had begun to fear that I might be the only one left. Our transportation was cattle cars and we kept hopping trains, trying to get closer to our destination. It took us two months to get to Bialystock and during all this time I did not know what happened to my mother and sister.

After all I had endured from the Germans; I was still shocked at the behavior of the Russians. It was a free for all - men lined up in front of a barn- where they raped a girl until she died. And this occurred over and over again. Once when Sonia and I were waiting for a train, she told me that if men came after us, she would try to shield me as I was a virgin and she had been married. At the time, I did not realize how much of a sacrifice this would be as there is an enormous difference between married sex and rape

Another incident occurred when the Russians came to check passports. Some of the men said that Sonia and I were their wives so the Russians took a German girl who was carrying her baby and repeatedly raped her. The child cried all night and the German girl was only half alive when they released her. I was lucky that the Russians left me alone, but they did take the Polish girl who later returned with some bread. She

also had a note that said we could go anywhere we wanted to. We owed her our lives for on that day she had saved us.

We hid in a train that was transporting horses and thought we were safe. But the Russians found us and pulled us off- we were able to use the note and the officer in charge said,' and how many nights did you pay for that note?" They had us clean a whole building and then put us on another train. We came to a bombed out and deserted town full of yowling cats and two old ladies who had not escaped the rapacious nature of the Russians - they had been repeatedly raped. Once again I recognized the bestiality of some men regardless of nationality.

The three of us found a mattress and we stayed for a few nights but we could not find food. So the Polish girl once again had sex with a Russian soldier for food. We went back to the station and got on the trains again. After months of turmoil and travel, we finally arrived in Bialystock.

I looked for something to do and wound up working in a barber shop preparing the lather for shaving. I also met a shoemaker who let me sleep on one of his two beds with a girl named Hanka. Even with a job that gave me some food and a bed at night, I was worried because I knew that the Poles had killed Jews who returned "home". There was a curfew and the shoemaker came at 6:00 to take me back to his house. He watched over me and was an example of goodness in a world of evil.

The barber left to find his fortune in Berlin. In the barbershop, I had met a man named Yossel who told me that when the barber left I could come and cook for him as he shared three rooms in a bombed outhouse with some other men. We would go to the market together and even to the slaughterer for the chickens. He was good to me and reenergized my will to live. There were other people coming back from Germany such as Raya Uriashewitz who had lived with us in Traku. Yossel put them up in his rooms. It is strange that I do not remember his last

name but I do remember that he had beautiful bedding. How peculiar, that it was his bedding that made a lasting impression on a young, frightened, Jewish girl.

Yossel was going to Palestine- I could not decide what to do. Throughout the war, in the still secret part of my soul, I thought I would find my mother and sister and somehow we would recreate our life in Shavel.

Chapter 8- Despair, Liberation and the Beginnings of a New Life

"I don't remember who was the first one who came and told me that my mother and sister didn't survive....my mother died of starvation and my sister died from starvation and typhus on the day of liberation.."

I waited for news of my mother and sister and then I thought we would go back together to Lithuania. Eventually, I don't remember how, I was told that my mother and sister did not survive. Somebody told me, a girl from Shavel, who had been with my mother and my sister. She told me that my mother died of starvation and my sister of typhus and starvation on the very day of liberation. I broke down for much of my reason for going on had been to find my mother and sister. I began to feel that there was no reason to live and I felt guilt at leaving them- somehow, I thought I could have helped them survive. I wanted to die also for now I felt truly alone in the world.

The shoemaker was very worried about me and tried to watch over me. In the end I clung to the hope that my father had made it through the war. I also wanted to stay alive to maintain the memory and legacy of my family. I was a survivor and I did not die.

I was an orphan and banded together with other young people who did not know where to go. What was certain in my mind was that I would not return to Lithuania. At that time Yossel was my good friend. He was kind and affectionate to me and I craved friendship and yes, even

love. Yossel told me that he planned to go to Palestine but if I were determined to go to America he would go with me. But I did not want to marry. I wanted an education and to see new worlds - above all I wanted to try to have some teen- age years even though I now knew I would never dance at Palengen.

I remained undecided and stayed with other young people in what we called a "Kibbutz". Modeled, we thought, after the collectives that had formed in Palestine. An organizer arrived from Palestine to prepare us for life there the plan was to go through Germany and Italy and finally make aliyah (immigration) though it was illegal and dangerous. The British had closed the doors to Jewish immigration but the determined and the desperate were being smuggled in.

Our first stop was in a town call Sosnowitz in Poland. It was beautiful with leafy trees, verdant parks and elegant avenues. Our physical conditions were not so beautiful; most of us had a highly contagious disease called Scabies, which cause severe itching in our extremities. I was so miserable that I called Yossel to come and get me. Poor soul suffering from unrequited love, by the time he arrived conditions were better and I decided to stay with the group.

I had no government papers nor did the others and so we had to be very careful for we traveled as different nationalities all the time. Sometimes we were from Holland or Belgium and had to watch what language we spoke. As multilingual young people we were able to blend in more in whatever country we traversed. I clung to the papers I did have that were extremely valuable to me such as Alan Edwards's address and pictures of the British Prisoners of War. I still thought of them as my adopted family and hoped to see them again someday. The leader of the group confiscated my papers and pictures and ultimately lost them. Another loss to my bruised heart.

As we journeyed we came to a town not far from Munich where we stayed in a former monastery, St. Ottilien, which housed a hospital. The patients were mainly Jewish as were most of the doctors, but the nurses were German. With the psychic and physical war wounds these patients carried they were fearful of the German nurses and this was impeding their recovery. The nurses brought back terrifying memories so that the patients became even more traumatized. The decision was made to train some of us as nurses, though I now wonder how, we victims ourselves, had the stamina. After a few weeks recuperation, I started the nursing course that was to last six months thereby delaying our arrival in Palestine.

When we first came to St. Ottilien we were so poor that we were dressed in what looked like pajamas. One of the brothers of a girl in our group, Toby, managed to get a skirt and blouse for us to share. I remember that it was a blue skirt and a pink blouse and we treasured the moments when we could wear it.

We were ten girls who lived in one room on the third floor of the monastery. I did not know that in some special way we were recreating dorm life. We played cards, stayed up at night and shared girlish dreams. All of us took the course and qualified as practical nurses. I still have a picture of the graduation and of a special surgeon Dr. Riva Kaplan, who took an interest in me. I was still looking for my mother and attached myself to women who earned my trust. I worked in the hospital and discovered that I was very good at it. I understood only to well what the patients had experienced and I was able to help them on many levels.

But it was not all work as I did what girls of my age take for granted. I went out with young men- one in particular Roman Lubetsky- and we often took a train to Munich to see movies or sneak into the opera. It was very cold and I did not have a warm coat so we would pretend that

would pretend that it was hot and we did not need warm coats. It was a platonic relationship without pressure and he was smart and funny.
I wanted to remain unattached and open to new experiences and friendships.

I developed a circle of friends, both male and female and we would go to dances in Lanzberg. Some of the boys had a double bed and when we slept over we would be five or six to a bed and roll over at the same time. It was innocent and to me normal and helped a little to fill the enormous ache and void in my life.

During this period, I was waiting to leave Germany and still did not know whether my destination would be Palestine or America. In the meantime' Osia Magun, who was one of the recuperating Jewish men, had told his mother in America about me. She had placed an ad in a New York paper looking for the Kutay family (my mother's brothers). Fortunately, my uncles saw this and contacted me.

Uncle Joe and his wife Mary, Uncle Morris and Ethel, Uncle Elias and Rose, Uncle Sam and Etta, my uncles told me to come to America. I was more than ready for a new life, where the movies told me, "The streets were paved with gold".

There was a new worry for me. People with Tuberculosis were not allowed to immigrate to America. I took x-rays to make sure that I was free of the illness. Strangely enough there was a young man who had someone else take the test for him, as he feared he had the disease but the substitute had tuberculosis and both of the men died.

In March of 1947,a Mr. Lipkin, who had been a friend of my father, suggested a course of action. He was in Frankfurt working for an Orthodox Jewish organization, Vad Hazalam that was helping rabbinic students go to the United States. He was willing to arrange a fictitious marriage with a rabbinic student. When we got to America we would be

divorced. For his services he wanted $500.00. When I wrote this to my uncle Joe, he did not hesitate and said, 'just come".

I traveled numerous times to Frankfurt to finalize the arrangements- I sat up all-night, cold and alone in the darkened train. I saw Mr. Lipkin in Vad Hazalah (a rescue organization) and then I would go to see Stanley to collect the cookies my Aunt Mary had sent to me via her cousin Stanley Orentz. Stanley had become my friend and I looked forward to seeing him and literally devouring the sweets (I was so hungry for this delicacy that I often ate them on the spot). This was the only highlight of a long and tedious journey.

It took five long months but eventually I married a rabbinic student, Chaim Ginzburg, and we left for America. I was certainly not a vision of a bride. I had a coat that my aunt had sent me, some socks that I knitted, two dresses that were made for me from pieces of material and Probably one of the most meager "trousseaus" ever but I was excited to be leaving.

Nov. 21, 1947.

Dearest Mother!

That may be will sound funny that I'm writing a letter to a dead mother, but mother for me you are not dead for me you still a lifing I need you what ever you are or better I want to be with you O dearest mother I'm unappy I cann't live more without your a child without a mother have not to live, mother where ever I'm going I'm alone nobody thinks about me – I'm allright or I'm sick I'm warm dressed or I'm cold nobody ask me about school the way you use to ask me, O mother I'm lost I can not be more alone. help me take me to you I'l be better off I'l have you I'l have my all familie I'l not be alone. Mother I write to you and hope that you hear me my heart is talking to you – why are you so bad to me please hear me and take me with you. Mother I see you in my dreams but there you are so bad to me not the way you use to be realy you always say to me that I can not be with you together you are in an other world you are always so nice looking like alive always long nice dresses and me you push always

further from you. mother. you always smile to me with your sweet smile, but from far you always say Sara you will be happy. O Mother I'm not happy I'm said I am realy unhappy. Today is my birsday ~~I am 19 years old~~ I'm already 19 years old. as to the years I'm already a big girl but realy I'm a child and need a mother and your caresses. Mother that is already three years that nobody gave me a real mother kiss and look at me with so much tenderness as you. O mother I need you I am unhappy please hear me and take me to you with you I'l be happy everwhere. O mother don't forget me.

X March 22, 1979 2:30 am found this letter among other old letters - was looking for it many times. I remember writing it while sitting at the Kaufmans 946 E 26th St at the closed ~~in~~ porch

Chapter 9- America and a Reconstructed life

" I didn't want to go out with survivors because no matter what we talked about, we always wound up talking about the concentration camps....this was my private hell- no partners"

I engaged in a fictitious marriage, not dressed in a white gown with my head filled with fantasies of a romantic future and a houseful of children, but as a way of overcoming the very limited Lithuanian quota for immigration. Chaim and I went from Stuttgart to Bremenhoffen to board a ship. Unfortunately, there was a boat strike and we were forced to remain in the town for several weeks. You can imagine how uncomfortable this was. I was eager to get going and yet I was in the company of somebody I did not know who I hoped to leave as soon as we came to America. We stayed in one room with a Hungarian couple and their baby. The men slept on one side of the room and the women and children on the other separated by a sheet.

Finally we left on the SS Fletcher. I was below deck most of the time, sleeping in a hammock and suffering from seasickness. Interestingly, even though this was a fictitious marriage, Chaim was unhappy when I struck up a friendship with a dentist who was traveling to America as well. This should have been a signal to me that the divorce would not be so easy to get.

We arrived on August3, 1947 and immediately went our separate ways. Uncle Joe, Aunt Mary, Uncle Sam, Aunt Etta, Ita and Sydney Iwens

Leo Gobstein and other acquaintances, some from St. Ottilien, were there to greet me.

We did not stay in Manhattan but went immediately to Bushkill, Pennsylvania. Bushkill was a small farming community and did not look anything like my dreams of America. My Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary ran a small hotel with a 40 person capacity. I was welcomed with many boxes of candy- that I would ate rapidly- unfortunately relationships would not be so sweet.

My Uncle Joe felt that he had not done enough to bring my family over when my mother had written to him in 1939 asking for help. He was living on a $1,000 dollars a year and did not have the resources but his nieces did and he did not ask them. He was guilt ridden and tried very hard to do the right thing for me. He did not hesitate in doing everything he could to see to it that I came to America, even paying $1800 dollars to Vad Hazolah for Chaim's and my passage. Later I found out that the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had already paid the fare.

My Aunt Mary was childless and unable to relate to a needy, lonely girl who had survived unimaginable horrors. She too tried to do the "right thing" and took me to Strausberg to buy skirts and tops so that I would be able to go to school in September. Perhaps my expectations were too high and I wanted in some way to recreate the warm family life of Shavel, but Mary was nothing like my mother, Bushkill felt so strange and I was very unhappy.

I had been confined in small spaces for so many years that I looked to be outdoors whenever possible- I needed some form of escape. My Uncle Joe had a raft that he kept on the Delaware River. It was a place of beauty and serenity though the water had strong undercurrents. I did not recognize the danger until I tried to swim, was not able to rise above the current, and sank. Fortunately a young couple from New

York observing my dilemma taught me how to navigate the river. I was so grateful because this skill gave me mobility and a chance to free my thoughts from the unhappiness I was experiencing. To this day, I love the water- I swim in a blue pool under a blue sky and a sense of calm permeates my soul.

My relatives in Bushkill knew that I needed to get a good education and decided that I would go to live with my Aunt Mary's sister and her husband, Ida and Abe Kaufman, in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Their home was close to Midwood High School. I occupied their daughter Raquel's room off the kitchen as she was away at college. Ida, Abe, Jessie (their son) and Mary's father all lived in this small house. Unfortunately the living arrangements did not work out. Abe appeared to be attracted to me and Ida felt that I was encouraging him. How sad that they could think a young girl, struggling to learn a new language and culture and to recreate her life would be interested in a much older man married to her aunt's sister. They did not know how truly innocent I was but it is shameful that they violated the trust of a bereft girl who sorely missed her own family-father, mother and sister.

My luck was about to change, however, in that the Dean of Girls at Midwood High School, Flora Shore, had become concerned about me. Her family was from Lithuania and she had all the compassion and empathy that I had sought from my aunts. She did not feel that my housing situation was appropriate and temporarily found me a room with a Mrs. Henry though I did eat my dinner with Etta and Sam and their son Steven. I did not feel at home and Flora continued to look to place me in better circumstances.

Finally, Flora found a place for me with Rose Risikoff. She was a war widow and needed someone to care for her son, Peter, in the afternoon until she came home from her teaching position at Midwood High School. Rose was so kind that she gave me the small bedroom she had used and

slept in the living/dining room area (a reminder of the sleeper situated in the same place in our apartment in Shavel.)

Rose offered to pay me $5.00 a week to do the laundry and other chores but I refused the money, as I did not want to be considered hired help. I was so keen to be a "member" of the family and thought of her son Peter as a little brother. In the end, I did the chores anyway without payment and had no money at all.

I was a schoolgirl, struggling to learn English and to bring home the "fives" even though my father was no longer alive. To add to my concerns, I was still" married" and I knew that I had to resolve my status. Aunt Mary's brother, Lou Yavner, recommended a lawyer who specialized in divorce and litigation issues. Chaim, my fictitious husband, decided that he was in love with me and objected to the divorce and so the proceedings took a year and a half. I demanded that he stick to the terms of our agreement. I still owed him money so during the two summers I worked as a waitress in Bushkill in order to pay off my debt. He was finally out of my life.

I was eager to make up for the lost years and so I completed high school in three terms. I enrolled in Brooklyn College in February of 1949, with the ultimate goal of becoming a doctor. This was an unusual career choice for a woman at that time and more so for me as I did not have the funds nor the benefit of support from my parents. One of my surrogate mothers who had befriended me at St. Otillien, Riva Kaplan, herself a surgeon, said" look at me, I was a surgeon and I could never be pregnant because it didn't look nice…you don't want a life like that. nursing will be good for you, its good for the family…"

I took her advice and applied to the Mount Sinai School of Nursing in New York City. My recommendations were excellent and my training as a practical nurse added to my credentials. But once again I experienced a barrier of ignorance and prejudice. At my interview the head nurse,

who was German, asked me about my past. I told her that I was a survivor of the concentration camps and a death march in which most of the women perished. She asked me how I could survive when everyone else died-and then warned me that Mount Sinai had a quota for Jewish nursing students. I was shocked and told Flora Shore who suggested that I enter the program at the Jewish Hospital in Brooklyn which I entered in September of 1949 and three years later on September 13, 1952, I graduated among the top of my class. I also had six months of training at a psychiatric facility and further education at a hospital for contagious diseases.

I was not "all work and no play" for I had on an active social life. I dated a great deal but only went out with American boys because I did not want to talk about wartime horrors with other survivors. I felt that this was my private hell and did not want to relive the suffering. Perhaps I was trying to be as "normal" as everyone else. My social life was very busy. I went out in the afternoon. I went out at night. I expected my dates to take me to lunch or dinner as I had very little money and I had to eat.

My "romances" were more serious for some of the men than for me as I was not ready for commitment. There is only one person from my past who I regret inadvertently hurting. He was a dentist and he not only fixed my teeth which were in very bad condition due to the years of starvation but he would also have dinner waiting for me and bring me back to Brooklyn from his office near the Yankee Stadium. He was a decent man and he loved me. Years later, another dentist remarked about the excellent quality of my dental work-how could I tell him that it had been a labor of love-a gift to a young woman who did not reciprocate that love but who has fond memories of him to this day.

Looking back at this time in my life I realize I was trying to gain the experiences of American life as quickly as possible: high school, nursing school, advanced training and an active social life. I relied on my

"surrogate" mothers, Riva, Flora, Rose who were there when I needed them- I will forever be grateful to them.

MID F28

TEL: MAnsfield 6-6610

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CITY OF NEW YORK
MIDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
BEDFORD AVENUE AND GLENWOOD ROAD
BROOKLYN 10, N.Y.

JACOB M. ROSS
PRINCIPAL

October 6, 1948

Registrar
Mount Sinai Nursing School
Mount Sinai Hospital
Fifth Avenue & 100 Street
New York, New York

Sir:

I should like to enter a special plea for Miss Hannah Matuson, a student of mine, who is an applicant for admission to the school.

I consider it a rare joy to have known this wonderful young lady during the year that she has been in the United States. Her quiet and beautiful courage has been an inspiration to my students and myself. I wish it were possible to share with you some of the exciting moments we have experienced in knowing her. There is a piquant and charming humor that she brings to her usual searching and intelligent observations of life about her. She is that unusual human being that seems always to generate a warmth and kindness we hope for and rarely find. I know you expect her to be more mature than other applicants because she is older, but I assure you that her maturity has depths far beyond those years.

I fully realize that you are concerned about her ability to master the difficult technical English necessary for her nursing studies. However, in one year she has accomplished wonders in English; her application in preparing herself for these advanced studies is remarkable; she has the strength of character and the intelligence to succeed in further overcoming her present language difficulty.

My only regret in this letter is that I have not the power to reach you personally so that I might better impress you with my respect and high regard for the character, ability, and promise of Hannah Matuson. I do not believe it is presumptuous to say that she will prove herself worthy of ranking with your outstanding graduates.

Sincerely,

S J Bernhard

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CITY OF NEW YORK
MIDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
R
BEDFORD AVENUE AND GLENWOOD ROAD
BROOKLYN, N. Y. (10)

JACOB M. ROSS
PRINCIPAL

October 22, 1948.

Director of Admissions,
Mount Sinai Nursing School,
Fifth Avenue and 100th Street,
New York City

Dear Madam:

May I make this special recommendation in behalf of Hannah Matuson, a member of the Senior Class of Midwood High School who has applied for admission to the Mount Sinai Nursing School.

This young lady's case is a most unusual and deserving one. She is a refugee who has achieved wonders in the year that she has attended this school, maintaining a scholarship average of 88%. She received certificates of excellence in Intermediate Algebra and Chemistry.

In addition, she possesses outstanding qualities of character and personality traits, and is held in highest esteem by her teachers and fellow-students. Following are a few testimonials by her teachers:

> Our Dean of Girls states: "It is a pleasure to write the following: Hannah is a superior student in every way. She has a fine mind, a charming and winning way, and a mature attitude toward difficult problems. America gains a great personality and a good citizen when she helps educate Hannah."

> Her English teacher states: "I am delighted to recommend Hannah Matuson as an outstanding young lady in every respect. Her work is excellent, as is her cooperation and service. She is one in a thousand who has shown her character by her attitude and courage in facing life after a frightful experience, with bravery and without rancor or bitterness."

> Her Speech teacher states: "Hannah is the exemplification of the exceptional young lady, rarely, if ever, found in our schools. She has great enthusiasm for learning, remarkable spiritual courage and quality, a deep and abiding sincerity. She is the kind of person that makes us find glory in the human race."

I have become greatly interested in this young lady, and sincerely hope that in view of her outstanding achievement and excellent personality her application for admission to Mount Sinai Nursing School will be given favorable consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Jacob M Ross

Jacob M. Ross,
Principal

Chapter 10- A new Life

" I determined to justify my survival for my father, for my mother, for my sister and for the many who did not survive the Holocaust."

At long last, Bill. I was dating a number of men, making up for lost time, meeting different people and becoming more comfortable with the American way of life. But none of my dates made me want to spend the rest of my life with them - in fact I was somewhat selfish in that I wanted to get my education first and not be tied down to anyone. I did sense, however, that something was missing and that the dating was increasingly shallow and did not fill the void in my heart.

While nursing in Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, I had a patient who was very heavy and I needed the help of her husband to adjust her position in bed. We began to talk and he asked me what sort of man I was interested in meeting. I told him I wanted someone who was tall, dark, handsome and rich. He said that he knew a fellow in his law firm who was handsome but not tall and certainly not rich. I decided to meet him anyway as I filled up my dating calendar around lunches and dinners. Bill came to take me out and wore pointed shoes, which I hated and yet there was something appealing about him. We went to the movies to see the Red Shoes (I had already seen it five times) but I didn't let on.

Bill asked to see me again and I set up the meeting in a restaurant (I was living on $10.00 a month and my dates were literally a meal ticket). He ordered the same meal as I did and I chastised him for it saying

that I wanted the variety that two different dinners would afford. Bill took my criticism with a calm fortitude that would prove to be a hallmark of his character. I then went to do an internship at a psychiatric hospital on Long Island- Bill came with a friend who had a car and took me out. It bothered me that he was so poor and did not even own a used car but I kept going with him. I was dating others and still looking for my rich romance and yet there was Bill, kind, lovable and very attractive.

Although Bill was warmhearted and I was increasingly comfortable with him, I continued dating others, going out everyday. But Bill was ingratiating himself into my family life. We went together to see Uncle Joe and Bill stayed over. At the time I was waiting on tables to make extra money and the guests wanted to know if Bill did anything else besides eat. He met my "surrogate" mother Rose and her son Peter. My friends were worried that an American would not understand or be able to cope with the horrors of my past and so I decided to tell Bill of my war- time experiences. When I finished I asked Bill how it had affected him and he said, " Okay, I will have to be extra nice to you." He handled the situation with maturity and compassion, so I knew he was the man I had been looking for.

Rose went away for a trip to Israel with her son Peter and before she left she suggested we get engaged. Bill had been pressing for a commitment and so in May we took Rose's advice. I decided that he was intelligent, honorable and frankly had become, without my realizing it, extremely important in my life. I was also very comfortable with his parents Nathan and Pauline, especially his mother who was as kind and compassionate as her son. She was the mainstay of the family as his father had been shot in a store they had owned and was disabled. Most important they accepted me, as did his brothers. His sister had died of cancer at the age of 32, leaving behind a young son. Bill's compassion and empathy stemmed in part from the death of his sibling and the trauma his father had endured.

Our wedding came one day after I graduated as a nurse. My Aunt Etta bought me a dress-it was, of course, white with a high collar, long sleeves and I looked virginal. For even with all my dating, I had not engaged in the sexual act with anyone. In fact, after the first sexual experience as a married woman, I wondered what the hullabaloo was about. Some things really do take time.

The wedding was held at the Jewish Temple in Bay Parkway, Brooklyn. It cost $500.00, which was a lot of money at that time and Bill, whose salary was $25.00 a week, paid the cost. He wanted me to have the wedding that every young girl dreams of and he certainly did what he could. I was extremely nervous on my wedding day. My parents were not there to share my joy and my sister would never know a day like this one. My family tried to fill in for the loved ones lost to me forever.

My Uncle Sam and Aunt Etta sent out the announcements and Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary walked me to the Chupa. (wedding canopy). Rose was my matron of honor. My cousins came as well. Bill's family, mother Pauline, father Nathan and brothers Saul and Harold as well as Bill's friends Seymour and Jake participated. My"mothers" Flora and Rose were in attendance and Michael, Bill's nephew was the ring bearer. We even invited the couple, Vicky and Jules Lozewick, who had taught me how to swim in the Delaware River. She could not know it at the time but in her joy at my marriage, Vicky kissed and hugged me so hard that she sprained my neck and so I went off on my honeymoon somewhat the worse for wear.

We did not have a car and so Rose's nephew lent us his for the honeymoon. We were, like many young couples, going to Niagara Falls and then on to the Canadian side. I was eager to see Masha and Moishel Martin. My mother and Masha had been good friends and I had kept in touch with her. I had seen her in St. Ottilien and at a Displaced Persons camp in Europe and this was, for me, much happier

circumstances. I think I also wanted the connection to my mother's friend as a way of staying close to her on my honeymoon.

I was enormously touched when I found out that Masha had been babysitting for fifty cents an hour in order to give us $50.00 as a wedding present. She also filled our car with food. Throughout her life she would come for a two-day vacation to New York and stay with us. Our bond of kinship and friendship was an enduring one.

When we returned from our honeymoon, we discovered that Bill's boss at Dreyer and Traub had arranged for us to rent an apartment at 2111 Albemarle Road in Brooklyn. The rent was $75.00 a month and so Bill received a raise so we could meet this obligation. I was so excited as this was my first apartment and it meant that we were now adults with jobs, an apartment, friends, family and a future to look forward to. We did not have much money and so our apartment was sparsely furnished with a bed, sleeper couch, table and chairs and not much else-and yet it was a palace to me. Bill stayed at the law firm and I looked for a position in the medical field.

I took a job at a nursing home on Cayton Avenue, Brooklyn. A Rabbi L, who viewed it as a profit making enterprise, owned it. He told me that he expected to double his money in one year. For an idealistic young woman who thought nursing was to help the sick this proved to be an eye opener and a very bad experience. I was in charge of eight practical nurses that looked after fifty patients housed on three floors. I discovered that dirty sheets were used for incontinent patients and that all of the residents had old threadbare blankets. The butcher sent meat of the poorest quality that was barely edible. The Doctor did not show up for daily rounds and families neglected to visit their elderly and infirm kin. I tried to remedy the situation as much as possible, using clean sheets, ordering new blankets and changing the butcher's cut of meat.

One day, Rabbi L asked to take me to dinner at Sears. I, of course, called Bill and told him of the invitation. When I informed Rabbi L he was nonplussed and said that he had other ideas. I never went to dinner and knew that I would leave the job. I only stayed one month and yet when I left all of the nurses gave me parting gifts as tokens of appreciation for the reforms I had tried to put in place.

After working for several doctors in private practice, I took a position as school nurse at Ramaz day school. I liked the Jewish environment and helping to keep the children well. Two and a half years later my son Lionel was born and I left the school to care for him. He was a premature baby and had to have round the clock attention (my nursing skills certainly helped).. I was so delighted that I had become pregnant and was able to deliver a child considering that I was a bag of bones when the war ended and my formative years were tortured ones. Clearly having a child was the highlight of my life as I was fulfilling one of my vows to my parents to keep our legacy alive. To add to my joy, Gail was born two years later.

During this time Bill left his law firm and formed a partnership with an associate. It was very difficult until his partner brought in as clients relatives who were making records. Seymour, his partner decided to be their manager while Bill would handle the legal side. They were signed by RCA and ultimately had a hit record, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight". Things were really looking up. Bill also had other clients in the music world and was getting more deeply involved while his partner was moving into other financial transactions.

Bill, around this time, was asked by one of Uncle Morris's nephews, Eugene Victor, to help him run for Congress from our district; eventually he did drop out of the campaign but by that time Bill would become very active on the political scene as head of a reform group of democrats. He played a part in the election of an assemblyman from our community and worked for the election of Lindsey who was running for Mayor as an

independent. I was fascinated by the world of politics and realized that I had found my calling, working to get Carol Bellamy elected as State Senator as well as Liz Holzman for Congresswoman.

Because of our activism, Bill was asked to take an interim position as a Judge in the Civil Court- he was honored and left his law practice for three months, from November to January. When he returned to his practice, he found that his partner had alienated their best clients. Bill also realized that he wanted to remain a Judge and Lindsey appointed him to Family Court for four years. I, by this time was a State Committee Woman working with the party in Albany (but more about my political career later on).

It really was a wonderful life. I had great joy in rearing our two children. They received all the hugs and kisses I felt I had missed. They had the birthday parties I had envied as a small child. When Lionel was eight I became a nurse at summer camp so the children could have a special summer experience. I remained a nurse at Camp Ramah for seven summers until the children became assistant counselors themselves. After camp ended each year we went on a special family vacation for two weeks seeing different areas of the country.

Our friends had become family and to this day, we retain strong ties with special people like Ruthie and Yasha Benzell. Ruthie was my sister's friend in Shavel, survived the death camps (as did Yasha) and had two sons and four grandchildren who are the light of their lives.

The years went by the children grew up. Lionel graduated from Cornell Industrial Labor Relations School and the University of Buffalo Law School. He is serious, dedicated to helping others and has used his law degree primarily in the non- profit sector. There are two incidents that stand out in my mind as examples of his character. When he was at Cornell, he was walking with a friend as a car went up on the sidewalk. He pushed his friend out of the way and took the brunt of

the accident himself. He suffered head injuries and severe breaks in his leg, was in the hospital for almost two months- and yet did not miss a term of school. The second incident is an indication of his unwillingness to incur any special favors for himself. At his Law School graduation, he introduced his father as Mr. Rigler, not Judge Rigler- not wanting to trade on his father's position as a New York Supreme Court Judge. I don't know how Bill felt about this, but I understood that Lionel had grown into an independent man who would make his way on his own merits. Lionel is married to Nancy Suchman, who has a PH.D in psychology and both work in fields that help to make the world a better place..

Our daughter Gail graduated from the State University of New York at Albany and received an MBA from the University of Maryland. When she was a child she was very shy and asked me not to introduce her to anyone. Today she is a Global Vice President for Marketing at a major corporation. She is married to Michael Milner, a financial advisor. Our precious grandchildren, Matthew and Danielle, have given us much happiness and we are doting grandparents always willing to spoil our grandchildren..

For Our fiftieth anniversary, Gail and Michael took the whole family on a cruise to Alaska. What touched me most was his toast in which Michael said," I hope that my marriage will be as good as yours for fifty years."

Bill-my husband, lover, father of my children and companion of my heart, and I are having an interesting life journey. There are times when I wished for death but I am a survivor and I know that life is the ultimate gift with its joys and sorrows. The human heart can and does break but it mends when healed by joy and love.

Chapter 11- Doing Good in the World

"I live in a dual world of present and past as keeper of my family's legacy."

I often wondered why I wanted to marry a rich man and now I know - it was to use money to do good in the world. Then I found another route. I entered politics originally to help Charlene Victor's husband Eugene run for Congress from our district. I found, to my delight, that I enjoyed collecting petitions and especially meeting people. Even though Victor lost the election (the other candidate had backing from the Democratic machine and the election was" rigged") I was not daunted and decided to lend my time and effort to Democratic reform group that Bill was heading. Actually, Eleanor Roosevelt had come to encourage the group that met in Charlene's basement.

I liked meeting the neighbors and discussing issues. This foray into more intense political work was a natural for me as I had been very involved with the Parent Teachers Association of Public School 139. The neighborhood was undergoing demographic changes and I wanted to make certain that the quality of schooling would not be compromised.

When Elizabeth Holzman decided to run against Emmanuel Cellar (she had been a State District Leader) Liz Miller, wife of Assemblyman Mel Miller, asked me to run for the position of District leader. I was up against the organized Democratic club, which made it a very hard fought election. My opponent played dirty and told constituents that I did not speak English and spread other falsehoods. I used my skill in working

with people and lifelong ability to make and sustain friendships and was successful in winning the post.

I was in my element, Howard Samuels taught me how to keep a book of contacts, constituents, requests and actions - it was the foundation of a large network of connections that would be an enormous asset all my life. In fact when Mayor Lindsay was running his second campaign for mayor, he sent a limousine for my red book because it was so valuable (of course this was pre computer days). I was a District leader for six years and during that time; I was involved in congressional campaigns and worked with Charles Schumer among others.

Encouraged by Mel Miller, Assemblyman from the 44th District, Marty Markowitz, State Senator, and I met with the Planning Commissioner and set up a community organization to stop the deterioration of Flatbush. Within one month we formed the Flatbush Development Corporation with Michael Weiss an Assistant Principal of Boys High as President. We rehabilitated buildings, rebuilt Newkirk Plaza and the work of this group still continues to make an enormous difference, even today.

Another highlight of my career was the creation of a Senior Citizen Center in the basement of Shaare Torah Synagogue. This was the first of its kind, Lenore Freedman, as Director expanded the concept throughout Brooklyn.

As District Leader, I could also appoint inspectors for election day. I would see Meade Esposito, Brooklyn Democratic County Leader and get his okay but the "regulars" made it difficult as they refused to seat the reform inspectors on voting day. I was always treading a fine line.

During this time, I was also very involved in the rallies to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate. This was a very important cause as it had enormous implications for Jewish life in the country that initiated pogroms (riots)

against my people and in the world, as it would change the demographics in Israel and the United States. We sought the release of Natan Sharansky, Ida Nudel and other "Prisoners of Conscience". I organized a large rally in Brooklyn, in support of Soviet Jewry, called the March of the White Flowers, many thousands walked to Boro Hall.

While working for this cause I met two women whose friendships with me have met the test of time. On a trip to Washington to lobby Congress I sat next to Lotte Knoller- she told me that her father had been a physician in Brino, Czechoslovakia and when the war broke out the family was flown to Sweden. I shared my experience which was much more heartbreaking but we had a common bond in that we had both been uprooted from the life we knew as children. We still talk to each other every day.

I was also very interested in the education of young people. Edith Everett, another long time friend, was also Vice President for Soviet Jewry in Brooklyn, and she spearheaded the creation of the Hazel Weeks "University" as places for teenagers to drop by after school and received tutoring and other help. Later, she and her husband would become great philanthropists, donating to humanitarian causes.

There is an old adage, "be careful what you wish for, you might just get it." I had seen how effective Bill had been as a Judge and knew that was his calling. I was eager for Mayor Beame to reappoint him to the Family Court. However, I received a call from the Mayor's office informing me that Bill would not get his appointment unless I resigned my position as a District Leader. Supposedly they were concerned about conflicts of interest. I did resign even though the Women's Bar Association took up my cause. They did gain the right for a woman to hold a political position independent of her husband's job. -but it was too late for me. I resigned on a Thursday and Bill was reappointed on Friday. Bill not only sat on the Family Court, but Meade Esposito having worked with me and recognizing my integrity and honesty was aware that

Bill shared the same values. He gave Bill the designation to run for the Supreme Court and so my Bill, who I thought would never be rich, became wealthy in another way for now he could affect lives for the better and use his skills and talents to bring his blend of intelligence, compassion and caring to the State Supreme Court.

I wasn't District Leader any longer but I stayed active and involved in community issues-my Red Book did not retire. I went back to Brooklyn College at Rose's urging and received my BA and also an MA in Political Science. My career advisor, Sara Wolpin, became another lifelong friend.

I went to work at the Board of Education at first in testing and assessment and ultimately I became the Director of Outreach Programs responsible for overseeing contracts to provide food to seniors, the homeless and children in day care centers.

I retired from the world of paid work in 1994 and renewed my efforts as a volunteer. Today my main interest revolves around my promise to my mother, father and sister to keep memories of them and other victims of the Holocaust alive. And to make sure that future generations learn about the atrocities so they will be ever vigilant in combating evil before it erupts into another catastrophe of the magnitude of the Shoah.

I was Chair of the Center for Holocaust Studies, Documentation and Research in Brooklyn. In 1994 all of our interviews of survivors and liberators of the concentration camps were given to the Jewish Heritage Museum: A living Memorial to the Holocaust, which opened its doors to the public in 1998. I am a Docent, a member of the Speaker's Bureau and part of the Acquisitions and Exhibits Committee. I am at home in this museum surrounded by images of people close to my heart. I am at home with my family, my community, and finally, as a Jew, with my memories and awesome legacy.

Chapter 12 – Retrospective

"All in all, my life in America is a very nice life".

My life has been filled with coincidences and connections. I know my survival was a combination of courage, risk taking, adaptability and down right luck. When I reflect on my journey. I have had extraordinary friends and strangers who have become family. It is difficult to choose among the individuals who helped save me and aided me for there were so many of them-from the anonymous German solder with the gentle eyes who gave me bread, to the Russian girl Sonia who slept with soldiers so that I could eat-to the British POW's who found a quivering bundle of rags and understood there was a soul to save.

When I came to America, I found more help –uncles who tried to give a young girl some family connection, school counselors and advisors, my "surrogate mothers, Riva, Flora, Rose, and my good friends who moved into the corners of my heart including Jake who was instrumental in my meeting Bill.

I have decided to tell you about four (plus ten) people who contributed to my truly amazing life – extraordinary in that my experiences have culminated in what has become, as in Shavel "a very nice life".

My Bill

Bill is my husband, my lover, and the father of my precious children, Lionel and Gail, grandfather to Matthew and Daniell and my dearest friend. We have been married 52 years-yet it seems like only yesterday that a young girl seeking a tall, dark, handsome and rich husband met the real man of her dreams. He wasn't tall, he wasn't rich but he was handsome and kind. I was not the easiest person to live with for the war experiences had left their mark and sometimes my loss got the better of me. Bill was, and is, always there to catch me before I fall and to encourage me to live life to the fullest.

Underneath his calm judicial mien beats the heart of a romantic. He waited for me when I was busy dating others, courted me with a passion that I only now understand and most important gave me the home and family I longed for. He has stood by me through the days of my life and I know my journey would not have held the great measure of happiness it has without him.

Uncle Joe

Uncle Joe paid my passage and opened his home and his heart to me. He was a complicated man - brilliant and possessed of a photographic memory as well as a master bridge player. He loved opera and classical music and yet he listened on an old scratchy radio that certainly ruined the sound. He was a farmer, ahead of his time, using organic methods, but he had little commercial sense and remained monetarily poor most of his life. He had one suit that Aunt Mary used to take in for the summer (when he lost weight) and let it out in the winter. The only new tie he bought was when I got married.

It was hard for him to understand the desires of a young girl who had been deprived of her teenage years and had grown up in a home where

beautiful objects were treasured. He never stopped feeling guilty about not doing more to bring my family to America and tried to make it up to me. I appreciated his goodness, integrity and earthiness. He was also very stubborn and when he took a position he could be very righteous. I knew much as I loved him I could not live with him-and yet he helped arrange for me to receive the education I wanted so much.

Flora Shore, Dean of Girls, Midwood High School

Flora sensed how frightened and lonely I was when I entered Midwood High School in August 1947. I did not speak English and had not been in school for six years. I was on the brink of adulthood but in many ways was still a child. She insisted that I eat lunch in the teacher's cafeteria every day and was always available to me. In fact her secretary knew to send me right in. She chose my academic curricula and was involved in my personal life as well. She was the one who brought me to Rose Risikoff so that I not only had a place to live but a home as well.

Rose Risikoff

Rose was a war widow, rearing her son Peter on her own. She understood what it was like to lose loved ones. She became my" foster" mother and even helped me through the traumatic time when I was seeking the divorce that Chaim had promised me in Frankfurt. She took a wounded spirit and helped me rebuild my life. Rose was my advisor on American customs, social etiquette and even when I was in training to become a nurse, I brought my dates home to Rose. Bill did most of his courting on her couch. She was the matron of honor at my wedding and was always there for me throughout her life. Today, Bill and I have a summer home in the mountains of New York thanks to her generosity and we spent many weekends with her enjoying her love and friendship. She

was the grandparent to my children that my own parents would have been had they lived.

There were so many friends before I married Bill and after - I still keep in touch with couples we went on vacations with or met in my political work. And yet, looking back, the most important connection was with ten men from a different culture, different religion and certainly different generation.

The British Prisoners of War

Stan Wells, Alan Edwards, Willy Fisher, Bert Hambling, H(Busty)Scruton, Jack Buckley, George Hammond, Roger Letchford, Bill Keable, and Tommy Noble were my saviors. After the war years, I searched for them but I did not have an address for when I had been in the "Kibbutz" training to go to Palestine the group leader had taken my papers and lost them- I was particularly unhappy in that I no longer had Alan Edwards contact number.

When I married, I started to look even more seriously for Alan and wrote to every Edwards in the London phone book but did not receive an answer. And then, as had often happened in my life, chance played a role. I met a women from London at the Masonic Lodge Bill belonged to. I told her my story and she said that she would see what she could do as she had contacts with the London Police department.

In 1963, I received a post card from the War Office asking me what my claim was against Alan Edwards. I wrote back that I was searching for him and nine other prisoners of war to thank them for saving my life. Word got around and the story was published in the "People's Paper" May 14, 1968 written by Ken Graham. Although he took some literary license the basic information was there and within a short time I

received a letter from Willy Fisher as well as his Diary. Willy had written the diary in 1945 while traveling to Russia.

Alan sent letters to me and was so excited that I had survived. He wrote to me that he had always felt guilty that he had left me behind. Eventually I heard from all ten men but I corresponded only with Alan, Willy and Bert.

In 1972, we all had a very emotional reunion at the Portman Hotel. My ten angels came with their wives to see a woman who was no longer a bag of bones but had a productive and satisfying life. They toasted their little sister who had found a special place in their hearts - and the stoic British cried.

In 1988, an English Television show on the BBC, "Hearts of Gold" profiled the story of my survival and the ten Englishmen who risked their lives to save me. My arrival was kept a secret in that they were invited because they were told the show was to honor British prisoners of war. Only five were able to make the trip and were surprised and delighted to see me.

In 1989, due to my efforts they were honored at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and joined the special group of people who helped save the lives of desperate hunted Jews in Europe. Only five could come but all of them were designated as "Righteous Gentiles" and their names are inscribed on the Avenue of the Righteous. There was a moving ceremony in front of the Eternal Light as the rabbi recited the prayers for the dead. Later in the Hall of Remembrance, Alan Edwards spoke eloquently about the Holocaust and my rescue. Those in attendance were my friends including those who lived in Israel. We had a special Kiddush, in a separate room, for all who had come and they met my rescuers for the first time.

Afterwards, Bill and I took them to see Israel, now a haven for all Jews who face persecution worldwide. Perhaps had there been an Israel my family in Europe would not have perished and I would not be the only one remaining to keep their memories alive.

There is a tree firmly planted at Yad Vashem and its branches reach out to shelter a young girl from Shavel and the ten English solders who cared enough to save a child. Often when people speak about the Holocaust they are overwhelmed by the evil that almost succeeded in extinguishing the human spirit and then ten ordinary men appeared, whose humanity was so natural and real, that they helped to restore my faith in the ultimate triumph of life and love.

ROSE'S NOTE TO ME-THE DAY BEFORE SHE DIED)

actually May 6, 1986

Darling Hannah,

Very hard to express in words the depth of my love for you. No mother ever had a more devoted caring daughter. I bless the day and the person Tirza Shore who brought you to enrich my life with your generous gifts of vitality and enthusiasm

Enthusiasm.

May we have many more years of joy together.

Rose

'WHOEVER SAVES A SINGLE SOUL . . .'

Holocaust waif & her rescuers

By TONY BURTON
Daily News Staff Writer

As Allied and Soviet armies crunched into the Nazi empire from the west and the east in 1945, a prisoner of war working on a farm outside Danzig began to keep a diary. In tiny letters, Briton Bill Fisher scribbled his thoughts on the back of photographs and scraps of paper.

Years later he gave the diary to Hannah Rigler, wife of New York Judge William Rigler, because it tells a story of the rescue and resurrection without which she would not be alive today.

SARA MATUSON (center, top right), now Hannah Rigler of Brooklyn, was the only member of her family to survive the Holocaust. She took the name Hannah in memory of her sister. This month, on the Avenue of the Righteous in Jerusalem, she was reunited (photo above) with (left to right) George Hammond, Alan Edwards, Tommy Noble, Letch Ford and Stan Wells. G. FEINBLATT MEDIA IMAGES

She would not have been in Jerusalem this month to help plant a tree on the Avenue of the Righteous and to remember 10 men who saved a pathetic waif of the Holocaust.

'MOST CRUEL SIGHT OF MY LIFE'

On Jan. 26, 1945, Fisher wrote:

"I have seen today the filthiest, foulest and most cruel sight of my life. God damn Germany with an everlasting punishment.

"At 9 a.m. this morning a column straggled down the road toward Danzig [now the Polish city of Gdansk] — a column far beyond the words of which I am capable to describe. I was struck dumb with a miserable rage, a blind coldness which nearly resulted in my being shot. Never in my life have I been so devoid of fear of opening my mouth.

"They came straggling through the bitter cold, about 300 of them, limping, dragging footsteps, slipping and falling, to rise and stagger under the blows of the guards — SS swine. Crying loudly for bread, screaming for food, 300 matted-haired, filthy objects that had once been — Jewesses."

Fisher, a soldier in Nazi hands since 1940, was witnessing the dying throes of the Third Reich and the final obscene cruelties of its servants. The remnants of European Jewry were being driven about like dust in a storm.

Among them was starving, desperate Sara Matuson, then 16.

'I WENT SUDDENLY MAD'

"A rush into a nearby house for bread resulted in one being clubbed down with a rifle butt but, even as she fell, in a desperate movement she shoved the bread she'd got into her blouse. Some were fairly well-dressed (i.e. clogs and fur coats). Most were covered with sacking, some had no boots, some had packed a sack with straw to add a little warmth. As I stood watching I went suddenly mad. I tore into the smithy, grabbed my boots (I wear clogs as protection against the cold) and gave them to a barefoot girl. An SS guard dashed up with rifle raised to club me and I went to meet him with a mad desire to kill the bastard. The two (German) soldiers who I work with grabbed me and the SS reversed his rifle to shoot. One guard, whom I had not noticed, ordered the SS to stop, crying I was English. The two soldiers pushed me into the crowd . . . ."

In the column, Sara was almost crazy with hunger. She begged her mother for a diamond ring that somehow had not been found by the Nazis and slipped away to try to trade it for bread. Police found her and chased her back toward the column.

But Sara escaped and found refuge in a cow shed. That was where PW Stan Wells, a Briton, found her, lying in a feeding trough. She looked up at him and said, "Help me or kill me."

"I won't kill you," he said. "I'm English."

'EVERYONE BRINGS IN FOOD FOR OUR ESCAPEE!'

"Stan comes to me after dinner and tells me a Jewess has got away and he has her hiding in a cows crib. I suggest moving her to loft over camp. Plenty straw and the chimney from our fire will keep her warm. I arrange to take her to the camp. Wait till nearly dusk and go to Stan's farm, he hands over girl. I tell her to walk 5 paces near, on the other side of the road, and speak to no one. She is crippled, too frightened to understand me, grabs my arm. I am a bit windy as the Gerries will stop us as it is definite 'crime' for prisoner to speak or walk with women. . . . No trouble at all! . . . Hot water, soap, towel, old clothes, slacks, food, rushed up to her. . . . Take all clothing off kid, give her parafin for lice in her hair and bid her goodbye. She grabs my hand and kisses it — and tries to thank me, calls me herr — I say roughly, Drop it, we are comrades, only doing what we can. Had no chance for a good look at her, judge her to be 25 years of age.

"Everyone brings in food for our escapee! Hundred weight peas, ducks, hens, best part of a pig. Bread by loaves — and believe me she's ate 3 loaves today and 5 bowls of soup — somewhere around 22 lb of food. She's ill now — sick diarrhea. Suggest only milk for a few days . . .

"We had a good look at her. Her eyes are large as is usual with starvation, sunken cheeks, no breasts. Hair has not been cut, body badly marked with sores caused by scratching lice bites. Head still a bit matted and lice still obviously in. I got my forefinger and thumb around the upper part of her arm easily . . . Feet blue and raw with frostbite, the right heel is eaten away from frost and constant rubbing of badly fitting clog."

For three weeks the 10 Brits harbored and nursed the girl they called their little sister. With rough sensitivity they chose an older prisoner, a father, to bathe her. They forbade her to talk about her mother and sister, Hannah, and the death camp she had left behind.

All her relatives would die and in memory Sara would take her sister's name. That was after the PWs had been moved west and Sara was found by the Russians, after she was accused by them of being a spy, after she finally reached the United States, where she had relatives.

Diarist Fisher is dead now but in Jerusalem this month five of the aging saviors were reunited with Sara, now Hannah, for a ceremony of the righteous.

Asked why they had risked themselves with liberation so close, Scotsman Tommy Noble said: "She was a very nice wee thing and she'd been treated badly, like us. They were cruel pigs; we wanted to get them."

When they returned home from Israel the other day they each carried a medal inscribed: "Whoever saves a single soul, it is as if he had saved the whole world."

There was another reward, the knowledge that because of them a woman was alive and happy in Brooklyn, the wife of a judge, the mother of two children, a woman who always would have 10 brothers.

IOI)SPECIAL FOR THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS - ATT)MIKE LIPAK - Saraah Rigler with some of the five British ex-P.O.W's who saved her during a tree-planting ceremony in Jerusalem in their honor

Epilogue

My name is Sara/ Hannah and I was given the gift of life. Through me my father, mother and sister live on. I connect the generations – L'Dor v Dor- Gita, Samuel-Leib, Gail, Lionel, Danielle and Matthew.

Throughout my life I have maintained a network of friends who are special to me and have created an extended family based on ties of caring and concern. I am a living example that it is very hard to extinguish the soul-the Nazis, Russians, Lithuanians all tried- but as long as I am alive, and even after death, they cannot kill the love I feel for the people who have touched my life and I theirs.

I am a woman who never gives up as I have stared into the abyss of death at 16 and now at 76, 60 years later still keep my pact with my family and friends never to forget them and to do good in this world.

Sometimes when I consider the events of the past 50 years, the violence that culminates in wars, the greed and avarice that creates such inequality that there are still children who are hungry, the callousness that results in homelessness and hopelessness, I wonder if we will ever have a world of compassion and justice. And then I look at the perfect faces of Matthew and Danielle, full of innocence, trust and eagerness for life and I feel that it was all worth the struggle and even the sorrow.

The message of my story is a simple one - never give up. The message of my book is to use the uniquely human trait of memory to connect the generations and to work unceasingly to leave this world a better place than when we entered it.

All families are complex - they are the melding of individuality and connectedness to others. My father watched over me, my mother spoke to me in times of despair, my sister shares my identity, Uncle Joe gave me some semblance of family, my" surrogate" mothers advised me- and on and on.

Some would say I have been lucky and I have- but luck only impacts if you grab onto it and use it to help yourself and others. In an airplane, the stewardess tells you that in case of emergency use the oxygen first and then help the less able. I have spent my life following this admonition. I kept myself alive by resisting death when I left the line of the death march. I kept myself alive, when I fell into deep despair at the news that my sister had died on liberation day. I kept myself alive so that my family and my people would continue.

Gail, Lionel, Mathew and Danielle are my revenge on Hitler. Long ago, at Binder's farm, Annie said, " we won the war against the Jews". And it is true that 6,000,000 Jewish souls perished in the Holocaust. But the Jews are still here and so am I. This small group of people has such an enormous impact on the political, artistic, scientific and social life in America, Israel, and other countries that it continues to be a vital and powerful influence in the world.

My childhood in Shavel gave me the resiliency and courage to survive the years of horror. My adult life has been filled with ordinary events lived in an extraordinary way- for every milestone large and small- I have shared with Hannah. My father, mother and Hannah have never left my thoughts and, if anything, they have increased my capacity to love and be loved.

thoughts and, if anything, they have increased my capacity to love and be loved.

I am resilient, persistent, practical, compassionate, intelligent and lucky. Hannah and I have touched many lives and by surviving I have shown that even in the midst of great evil there is goodness - even in the midst of great sorrow there is the possibility of happiness - even in a world of indifference there is love and the gift of life.

You Can't Go Home Again

Bill and My Trip to Lithuania in May 1999

I am writing this on a plane going from New York to Dallas to visit our grandchildren. I am writing and crying from the pain of having seen my birthplace, Lithuania, once more. We were with a group of 24 people who had ties to Lithuania through grandparents and parents and had come to seek out their heritage. There were four survivors from Shaval-Jake and Ruthie Benzell and us.

There were no carefree "sunflowers" of my childhood. Lithuanian soil is soaked with Jewish blood- it is a vast cemetery without grave-markers. Only 4% of Lithuanian Jewry, out of 300,000, survived the others were killed by the Germans and willing collaborators among the Lithuanian population. Twenty four thousand Lithuanians were guards at concentration camps in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Poland.

Our journey began in Vilna, known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania. This was a superb center of Jewish learning and the Vilna Gaon (sage) was world famous for his extraordinary learning and powerful influence on the Jewish world. We are descendants of this phenomenal man and my family was enormously proud of the connection. At the time of this trip the Lithuanian government was erecting statues in his honor as a way of trying to communicate that they now were willing to commemorate the achievements and value the Jews of Lithuania- ironically when there are very few left to honor.

The Jewish State Museum has photo exhibits attesting to the destruction of the Jews. Pictures of my father's birthplace, Rokiski, show a group of naked young Jewish girls about to be shot. Their innocent faces plead for mercy that would never be granted. Imagine knowing that you are about to be killed for only one reason- that you are Jewish- and have this pain and terror caught on film. My mother's hometown, Anykst had been a vital center of Jewish life but no one survived and I could not find any indication that the community had existed at all.

One of the pictures in the Museum caught my attention- it was of my aunt's brother, Lazar Penn, who was the tallest man in Lithuania. He was blond; blue eyed and spoke perfect German. In this picture he is shown digging his own grave, unfortunately not an uncommon occurrence. (it had happened to my father as well).

Another exhibit, a letter written by an Mr.Gurwitch, about the atrocities perpetrated on Jewish women, young girls and men were so graphic that I could not read further. One-sentence sums up the contents, when he writes, " you had to be lucky to be shot".

We visited Ponar next. It is an eerily quiet place that is heart wrenching. The voices of 90,000 Jewish men and women shot by the Lithuanians and Germans or thrown alive into six very large ravines dug originally by the Russians to store oil are stilled and yet the soil cries out. We said a prayer for the dead and just stared into the ravines.

At Kovno, we spent time at a Fort where people were imprisoned, tortured and killed. The Russians erected an impressive monument to the victims of the Holocaust and there is a museum in the Fort where schoolchildren are taught about this devastating period.

Our nest destination was Shavel. I my mind, I remembered the streets, houses, Synagogues, friends and our pleasant life. Now there were 123

Jews left out of a population of 10,000. Before the war, the population numbered 28,000- today 168,000 many of whom is Russian.

I walked the streets looking for some sign of my past, but I was a stranger. Our house was still standing but it was in shambles. Two families lived in the apartment. The parquet floor where I was not allowed to walk with wet feet is painted brown. The balcony is gone the entrance is a beauty parlor and you come into the building from the back. The gardens are gone along with my glorious sunflowers that have lived in my dreams since I left Shaval. Instead there is a gray six-story building nondescript as those building are throughout the Baltic States. The Jewish cemetery has only three headstones still standing. There is a small plaque to identify the Traku Ghetto. So many people were crammed into that area - most would perish.

We went to see Kuzai where the Germans had killed my father, Lazar Penn, the Rabbis and so many others. In Kuzai there are ten pits-muddy swampy and unkempt. Only one pit had been closed and a monument was built there, attesting to the atrocities perpetrated by the Germans and their willing collaborators. The barn where people were made to undress before their death is still standing. We said Kaddish for my father and all who had been killed there.

Another killing field was Zagar, which we went to from Shaval. The name Zagar was synonymous with death. In the Shaval ghetto the dreaded threat was to be sent to Zagar. People were killed in the town square and thrown into pits in the nearby forest-Narishniki. I stood there and thought of how scared I had been of the mere mention of the name Zagar. Today there are no Jews.

We returned to Shaval and went down Main Street, which is now a pedestrian mall. A festival was in progress to highlight diverse nationalities. Lithuanian girls were dancing Hebrew dances. (there are no more Jewish girls to express their ethnicity and charm).

I really wanted to see Palangan where I have treasured memories of my wonderful family and our beautiful summers. We went to the beach, walked in the forest, picked fruits and, if old enough, danced in the café. Palangan still exists and it remains a famous resort though the voices of my childhood are forever stilled.

I left Lithuania knowing I could never go home again. I am the only survivor of my immediate family and it was small comfort to know that my father had not been tortured- but only shot. The world had turned upside down for me if I could take a modicum of relief from grief because of the manner of his death. But my mother and sister died painfully and I, try to continue their legacy, by nurturing my family and community and never forgetting the souls of the past.

Willy's Letter #1

c/o
52 Westfield Road
Bradford 9
Yorkshire

May 21st 1968

My Dear Sarah,

A friend of mine, browsing through the Sunday newspaper "The People", thought the article reminiscent of something I had once told her of a poor kid, and her extremely brave attempt to save herself from certain death, and decided to cut out the article and give it to me.

The result, on my reading it, was, believe it or not, to make the miserable cold day into perhaps what was the sunniest, and certainly one of the happiest of my life. I am by nature pretty hard and insensitive, but I must confess I do know now, what "tears of happiness" mean.

My joy at your being alive and well, and being transformed from that tragic waif I once met, into what your photograph shows, a very beautiful and obviously happy woman, in some measure made up for all the quilt I felt at being unable (or perhaps too cowardly) to do or risk more for you than we did, for I have never got over the feeling that we, perhaps should have taken you with us.

I have thought very often since, that perhaps we should have told Frau Schenke (The Policeman's wife in the cottage of the camp opposite the barn in which you hid) of you, in the hope, that perhaps one German of that period would help. But if she wouldn't or hadn't, what then?

How you eventually made your way I do not know, but then I do know, the very knowledge that you did so, had brought me a happiness I have seldom known. Thank you very much indeed.

You probably do not remember me personally, but I was with Alan Edwards hiding as you were, but under easier circumstances, with the girl who is now his wife. I have been out of touch with them for some years, but, due to you, I shall get in touch with them again.

Perhaps you will be interested (if you can read the aged scrawl) in the diary I wrote at the time. Actually it was written up between late May and June whilst travelling on a Russian train from Brest Litovsk to Oddessa, from notes I had made in the back of photographs and odd scraps of paper. It will not all be accurate, (Your name is Sonia? not Sarah!) as some was hearsay or second hand, but I think the salient features are accurate of the part that concerns you.

I do not know your address but will ask the Reporter of your story to forward it to you.

May I say once more thank you so much for bringing such happiness and joy to at least one rather podgy, balding elderly old Man!

Yours very Sincerely,

W.E. Fisher (Bill)

Willy's letter # 2

13-1-1969

My Dear Sara,

Please accept my humblest apologies for not answering your letters much sooner, and please forgive me for being so dammed lazy. In actual fact I have only written three letters in the past 10 years--two of them to you! However, now I have started, may I say how marvelous it was to hear from you, and to confirm that you were very happy with your family. The photographs are delightful, thank you very much indeed, for sending them. For goodness sake don't make me feel like a worm! Of course there is no reason why I hadn't written except laziness. I suppose to know you are alive and well, coupled to a quilty conscious about perhaps doing more than we did for you, passibly in the first place, and a bit shy of writing in the second place. I can only repeat the knowledge of your safety brought me such happiness I have rarely known.

I went to see Bill Scruton, who lives some forty miles from here, at X-mas. He lives very happily in a very small village, looking pretty much the same as I remembered him. It was the first time I had seen him since I saw you, and I am afraid we (or at least I) celebrated too well at the local inn. I rather "blotted my copy book" by proposing marriage to the very ancient hostess on the basis that she sold the best beer in the world! Some of the other chaps I have yet to get in touch with, (when I can get round to writing!) I have been in touch with Alan several times over the years. He is a very steady imperturbable character, plodding along with Wanda, his whife, quite happily and contentedly. His wife has made several trips back to Poland to the farm where three of us hid for the two months until the Russians came to the village.

The weeks after then, up to the time I left Odessa, completely cured me of any romantic ideas I'd had of war, or idealistic communistic views. The useless murder, rape and pillage outraged my feeelings to a very great extent over the next few years. The deliberate and wanton damage of such a calculated savagery left me with a loathing for my fellow humans. As a regular soldier, I had served with my regiment in many parts of the world, and I'd seen active service on the Indian Northwest frontier in Palestine against Arab guerrila, seen something of the Italian invation of Abysenia from the Soudenese frontier, and the Savage invation of the Japanese in China, but nowhere had I seen such bestial behaviour on such a scale, bestowed without thought on friend or foe, as took place in the "liberation" of Poland!

I don't know if Alan told you, but I left him, (as I believe I've written in my diary) and arrived home in July 45 to find my home had been bombed, my wife living with someone else, two brothers killed and on the night of my arrival my father died in his sleep due to overexcitement of my safe return. You can imagine

my thoughts! After six years of war, five of them as a prisoner, it was not an auspicous home coming. In a fit of childish reaction I realized all the cash I could muster and went on a "bender", which ended in my being picked up by the police in a very ill condition four months later and put into a hospital. This was perhaps the thing that brought me back to sanity, for at the hospital, were the real casualties of war. I saw chaps there who, straight out of Japanese camps, could only be compared to the concentration camp inmates of Belsen, and a short distance away, what was perhaps the greatest example to me of all, the "guinea pigs" as they called themselves, those so badly injured, so hideously burned, they were candidates for plastic surgery to rebuild their shattered and disfigured bodies. Their cheerfulness in the face of what was to be in many cases years of repeated and painful surgery was an example to me, and one that has never left me. From that time, I became interested in mankind and religion, and as the years passed I have become a convinced Atheist, believing that man and only man can come to the stage where he will be tolerant and understanding enough to live with his fellows irrespective of colour race and creed, and that the prayers offered up by the many creeds have no effect at all simply because they are superstitious beliefs, and that no creator could be so utterly awful as to produce the mankind he has produced. The contribution to my fellow man I can make is small, but as an atheist, I cannot afford to upset other people, I have to try to be kinder and more tolerant. I respect their beliefs, because religion, though it has failed, does bring confort to many who hold sincere beliefs.

After leaving the hospital, I decided to try teaching, but I found I'd got to take part in religious instruction, which I could not conscienciously do. I tried youth club work, which I liked but the field did not cover the real needs of youth. My old firm Philips Radio, got in touch with me and offered me a job in their newly set up Time and Motion Study. I stayed with them for a couple of years, and then joined a Management Consultant set up and spent some years wandering round the country and eventually with middle age and a waist line rapidly going up from 30 to 37" I decided to settle down with my present firm where I run a work study department for the Foundry section. I am reasonably happy, and live pretty much like any elderly bachelor, getting more set in my ways, probably getting more and more eccentric as time goes on!

Some years ago, I met and fell in love with someone who is deeply religious. Her name is Margaret, and she is gentle and kind to everyone but me - whom she bullies outrageously' (she knows I have written that last!). She will not marry me, because I have been divorced, a reason I respect, but do not agree with. We are devoted to one another, but I avoid any situation likely to develope into anything in the way of a

second relationship on the basis that if she cannot marry me, I cannot and will not "bed" with her! It was she who read that newspaper article, and brought it to my notice, and has since badguered me into writing you. Summed up she is the nicest thing in my life, and apart from being as intolerent as a puritan about some things, is reasonably normal; and is quite tolerent of me and my eccentricities; I have just looked at my watch 1.32 am; I'm off to bed! I've rambled on since 9:30 I think. By the way the address you have been writing to is Margarets', where she lives with her beloved father, and my great friend. I was in the throes of moving home when I first wrote you, and was not sure of my new flat. (apartment).

By the way I understand you had been to Israel when you passed through England. Was this true? Because it was one of the countries I loved very much, possibly because being a mandated territory it had not been "colonized" by generations of British colonials as had other parts of the world. It has always saddened me that the political expediencies has prevented Arab and Jew living in peace as they had even under the Turkish Rule. It is a lovely land, a fine climate and when I was there, a very friendly people, until 1936 when the Mufti of Jerusalem, stirred up the Palestinian Arabs to revolt. It is one of the few places I would like to go back to.

Margaret says I must enclose a snap of me to you. What heck for I don't know, but she is usually right, so I'll hunt one out. The one I wanted to send, she says is not any good, on the ground that I am not so revoltingly fat as I appear;

I have just read through this, and it reads like a right old load of nonsense, but them this probably is me, anyway. Perhaps also it will give you a picture of the sort of person I am. Finally may I close with a remark made by Margared when I showed her the photographs you sent me "God, who takes so much away, has also given this very beautiful lady much. I hope the scales are balanced".

I am sure she is right about the scales!

It just remains for me to wish you, Bill and the children every happiness for the future.

Will you all accept my heartfelt good wishes

Yours Affectionately,

Bill (Willy) P.T.O.

P.S.
I am not usually prone to have my photograph taken except at wedding etc. Hence this is one of the few I've got.
Compare how I've degenerated with the shot taken at the home of an uncle of mine around August 1945 in one of my more congenial moods. The two on the right are two of my younger brothers. Five out of seven survived the war.
P.P.S. I've popped in one of Margaret. Doesn't she look a frustrated spinster?

Letter #4

16.2.72

My dear Sara,

I am absolutely delighted you should be coming over. This will be too short to explain everything, but, briefly, I have be out of a job for nine months and have only just started on a job which requires many hours per week. Since receiving your letter (last one) I have been arranging for relief to be able to meet you.

This is now possible and I am most happy to tell you I shall be in London from the morning of the 27th unst onwards.

I cannot tell you how delighted I am to be able to see you soon.

Love,

Bill

Au #5

12 Bowling Old Lane
Bradford 5.
YORKS.

June 1973 ~
stamp is — July 1973

My dear Sara and Bill,

First and foremost--may I congratulate you on your Son. You have both done a very good job there! As for worrying about him-forget it. He will be absolutely O.K.-on this I will bet you. In any event, he will be welcome in any one of the places he has been in-IF-he needs help. But my quess ~~is~~ he will be completely independant and, unless something unforeseen happens, will not ask for help in anyway.

My only worry about him, was his rather shyness in saying he was unable to eat a lot of foods that were offered to him. I think he has now realized that most people--my friends anyway--and certainly Stanley and his wife--would be horrified to offend his religious beliefs, and would go out of their way to find suitable substitutes for Kosher food. Anyway in most large city-centers there are a number of Kosher shopes.

I have already written a letter to you but never finished it because of some sad news about one of my brothers. On my way back from leaving Lionel in London, I visited my brother in Birmingham-to discover he had only a short while to live--Cancer being the cause. This brother is rather close to me--and his passing will be a particularly bitter blow. However, so great is the suffering from this filthy disease, it would be wicked to wish prolonging life.

Anyhow-back to Lionel. It was rather a mix up, for I do not normally live in Bradford but have a small flat in Leeds to save expenses in travelling, and at the same time have been in the process of selling up my home in Bradford.

As it so happened I have had some trouble with my leg, and rather than be off ill I decided to take my annual vacation and rest up. 'So I arrived back in Bradford with the news from practically everyone who knows me that Lionel had arrived.

Apparently he had spent a couple of days in the Lake District and came down to me. This meant I was free to go off with him. I intruduced him to Margaret and her father--also to her sister and husband--and they immediately changed their oppinions of Americans in General! You couln't have a better Ambassador than that lad. He captivitated them!

We set off the following morning in my Dormobile--a sort of caravan with sleeping and cooking facilities,--with the object of reaching London before Friday evening.

I thoroughly enjoyed the next few days. These could easily be described as the "Saga of the ex-Christian, and the Kosher Jew". I think probably the most unlikely pair to visit every Cathedral of note and a lot of very old churches!

We started at York Minster and spent an hour or so wandering around until the devil of a storm caught us, soaking both of us to the skin. We went back to our mobile home, changged and I discovered he was Kosher--so off we went shopping --for as I pointed out most restaurants were not only decidely costly but probably used beef fat in most cooking.

So on this first day-we sat in the van munching happily on plaice, new potatoes peas, cheese, new bread, washed down with copious draghts of hot tea.

The rain continued, so we rather curtailed our visit for sight-seeing, and concentrated on museums. Poor Lionel! He hadn't realized that practically everywhere in England one has to pay an

Letter #11 Bill's last letter in two parts

October 26, 1976

My dear Sara, Bill and Family,

within a day or so of receiving your letter of Oct 15, I received one of my own back, it having been wrongly addressed by me! I had somehow managed to mix up your house number with the district number: I must be getting old.

Thank you very much for the photographs and the extracts from the Holocaust Centre. I am indeed greatly honoured to think what little service I rendered, is of use in diary form, for inclusion in your centre. I remember, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the horror, rage and disgust I felt, watching the pitiful, wretched column of which you formed part: Had I known then the extent of the horror of the concentration camps, I should have gone even more berserk biserk. As it was, I was fortunate that the German soldiers who were working at the blacksmiths where I was, took my part, and prevented me from harm. I have never been sure in my own mind, whether or not the German people, on the whole, knew of the camps or what went on in them. I rather think they either did, or suspected, but did nothing to stop it. I knew little of it till late March & April 45, during my wanderings, running into thousands of emaciated striped clad figures, many suffering not only from malnutrition, but typhoid and other fearsome diseases. Small wonder I watched unmoved thousands of Germans, rounded up in Danzig, being kept in a huge compound, and loaded into the self same "transports" (cattle wagons) they had used, and now themselves, starving, herded like cattle back to the west. It does seem ironic that today, that a flattened city country, most of its machinery plundered by the Russians, its technical

know-how captured by the Allies, is now, helped by the Marshall Plan the richest and most prosperous per head of population, in the world, I think there should be a moral there somehow!

By the way, that Diary of mine, was not original. Most of original diaries I kept, running into many hundreds of notes on all sorts of scraps of paper were stolen from me by the Russians, and were re-written from notes on the back of old photographs etc, while sailing from Oddessa to Toranto in May 1945, so many of the things may not be historically or chronologically accurate, but are certainly factually correct. However if I can answer any of you "pertinent " questions, I will do so with the greatest of pleasure. Are you sure there are no more English written diaries appertaining to the Jewish Camps? A sergeant Howard, wrote a book "The Password is Courage", about the substitution by a British P.O.W. camp of dead bodies for live ones, while working near a concentration camp, for which he was subsequently honoured by the Israeli Government.

And speaking of books, I was reminded the other day of the terrible delemma, Stalin posed to Churchill and Roosevelt. Apparently the question of Prisoners held by the Allies numbered hundreds of thousands of Russians, and anti-Tito Serbs Croats, etc; who were fighting with Germany against the Allies. The Russians while not admitting to any numbers, except perhaps a few, intimated, that failure to hand over all Russians as a lever they would hold all Allied personnel at Oddessa, in effect as hostages. The upshot was that hundreds of thousands of Cossacks, Ukranians, were forcibly repatriated, hundreds ~~of thousands~~ committed suicide,

Willy's (Bill's) Friend Margaret Heap from England

8th Dec. 1976

Dear Sara & Family,

Now that I have a few moments to spare after a most dreadful week I felt I must write to tell you that (Fisher) died after a heart attack last Wednesday, 1st December. He collapsed at work and was taken to hospital where he died a couple of hours later. The only names he mentioned were his Mother and your name. I found one or two of your letters when we were going through his papers where I got your address. There was no funeral service in keeping with his request and his body was cremated yesterday morning. He left it for medical research but they had to have a post-mortem and so his body was not accepted for research afterwards.

I don't have to tell you how we all feel at this sudden loss. He has not been well for some time but always tried to appear as if nothing was wrong.

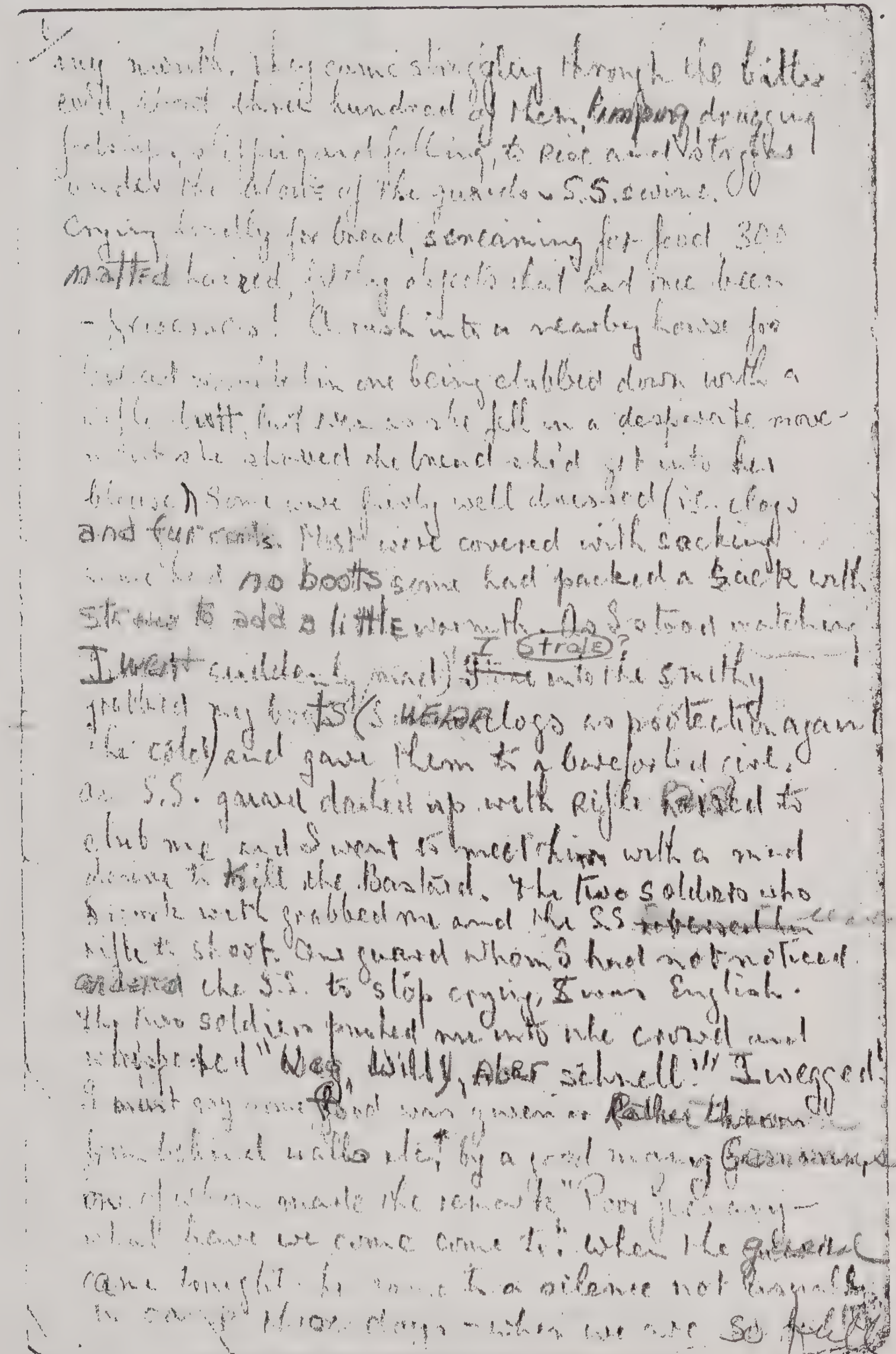
I hope you and your family are all well. We had the pleasure of meeting your son when he came to England and thought what a fine young man he was, and Bill has told us about you all. I am glad you have found happiness in America and hope this will continue for many years to come. I am sorry to be sending you such sad news, but I wanted you to know as soon as possible.

My best wishes and kind regards to you all.

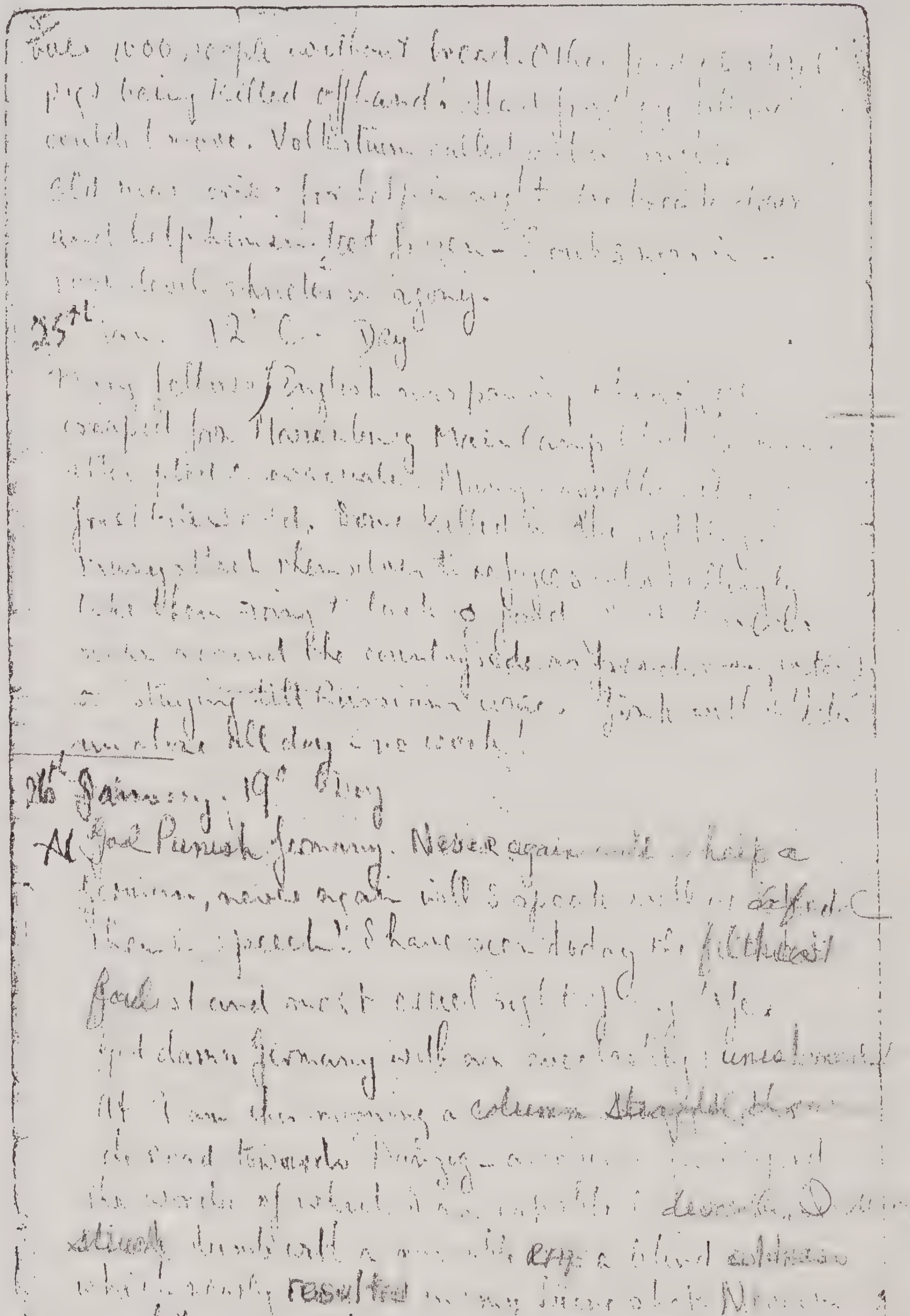
Yours sincerely,

Margaret Heap

The diary written in 1945-with pencil. It was transcribed -



any month, they came straggling through the bitter cold, about three hundred of them, limping dragging feet, slipping and falling, to riot and struggle under the blows of the guards S.S. swine. Crying loudly for bread, screaming for food. 300 matted haired, [illegible] objects that had once been — prisoners! A rush into a nearby house for bread resulted in one being clubbed down with a rifle butt, but even as she fell in a desperate move [illegible] she shoved the bread which got into her blouse.) Some were fairly well dressed (i.e. clogs and fur coats. Most were covered with sacking [illegible] had no boots some had packed a sack with straw to add a little warmth. As I stood watching I went suddenly mad) ~~I~~ I strole? into the smithy grabbed my boots (I wore clogs as protection against the cold) and gave them to a barefooted girl. an S.S. guard dashed up with rifle raised to club me and I went to meet him with a mind desire to kill the Bastard. The two soldiers who I work with grabbed me and the S.S. ~~[illegible]~~ rifle to shoot. One guard whom I had not noticed ordered the S.S. to stop crying, I was English. The two soldiers pushed me into the crowd and whispered "Weg, Willy, aber schnell!" I wegged! I must say some food was given or rather thrown from behind walls etc. by a good many Germans one of whom made the remark "Poor Germany — what have we come come to". When the guard came tonight he [illegible] a silence not usually in camp these days — when we are so full



than 1000 people without bread. Other [illegible] pigs being killed offhand. [illegible] could [illegible]. Volkstum called [illegible] old man [illegible] for help in night [illegible] break door and help him [illegible] [illegible] agony.

25th Jan. 12° C. Day

Many fellows / English [illegible] escaped from [illegible] Main Camp [illegible] Many [illegible] frostbitten, Some killed [illegible] take them away [illegible] around the countryside [illegible] staying till Russians come. [illegible] all day i no work!

26th January. 19° [illegible]

Al God Punish Germany. Never again will I help a German, never again will I speak with or defend them in speech! I have seen today the filthiest foulest and most cruel sight [illegible] God damn Germany with an everlasting uncleanness! At [illegible] this morning a column straggled along the road towards [illegible] — [illegible] the words of what [illegible] to describe. [illegible] struck [illegible] a blind soldier which nearly resulted in my [illegible] so devoid of [illegible] of [illegible]

January 24, 1945 cont.

PART OF TRANSCRIBED
WILLY'S DIARY

Work on Shattwell field kitchen belonging to the equivalent of our Base Repair depot Ordnance. Fellows pretty young. Fed up with war and Hitler-but determined to hold out against Russia for whom as ever they have overwhelming hatred. (95% of supply columns here and for weeks are purely Russians volunteers whom the Germans treat well enough.) All show amazement on learning I am English, that England is allied to Russia. I say nothing as from past experience shows a German has his mind made up for him by the government here and nothing can change it! Gave me a litre schnapps 50 ligo and two packets of tobacco. Well sozzled by knocking of time (4:30 p.m. now as all foreigners must be off street by 5:00 p.m. or shot on sight) Gunfire continously today. No news at all now. Zonk moved Radio to other room. Going home met two children

4-continued

crying, lost, no one paid any attention to them. 1½ hr. searching found their mother. Received more schnapps, tobacco and an offer of civilian clothing to go with them further into Germany. (Lack of men has made many refugees take French prisoners on and the French in majority of cases are making most of the opportunity and making up for lost sexual opportunities! Came back to camp to find lads have stolen a pig (found) lying frozen on a wagon! Alan says Baker working 24 hour day and still

5 over 1000 people without bread. Other food plentiful pigs being

kstwin / killed offhand. Had fried pig till we couldn't move. Volksturn called out in night. Old man cries for help in night. We break down and help him in. feet frozen- I rub snow in- poor devil shrieks in agony.

25th January 12°C Day

Many fellows, English now passing through, all escaped from

945

5-continued

Marienburg Main Camp which Germans attempted to evacuate. Many casualties through frostbite and cold. Some killed in the fighting. Many attach themselves to refugees who willingly take them owing to lack of food. Most however roam around the countryside as Frenchmen intend on staying till Russians come. Zonk with Volksturn am alone all day- no work!

26th January 19° Day

God punish Germany. Never again will I help a German, never again will I speak well or defend them in speech! I have seen today the filthiest foulest and most cruel sight of my life. God damn Germany with an everlasting punishment. At 9 a.m. this morning a column straggled down the road towards Danzig- a column far beyond the words of which I am capable to describe. I was struck dumb with a miserable rage a blind coldness which nearly resulted

5-continued

in my being shot. Never in my life have I been so devoid of fear of opening

6 my mouth. They came straggling through the bitter cold, about 300 of them, limping, dragging footsteps, slipping and falling, to rise and stagger under the blows of the guards -- SS swine. Crying loudly for bread, screaming for food, 300 matted haired, filthy objects that had once been--Jewesses! A rush into a nearby house for bread resulted in one being clubbed down with a rifle butt, but ever as she fell in a desperate movement she shoved the bread she'd got into her blouse. Some were fairly well dressed (i.e. clogs and fur coats. Most were covered with sacking some had no boots some had packed a sack with straw to add a little warmth. As I stood watching I went suddenly mad)! I tore into the smithy grabbed my boots (I wear clogs as protection against the

6-continued

cold) and gave them to a barefoot girl. An SS guard dashed up with rifle raised to club me and I went to meet him with a mad desire to kill the Bastard. The two soldiers who I work with grabbed me and the S.S. reversed his rifle to shoot. One guard whom I had not noticed ordered the S.S. to stop crying I was English. The two soldiers pushed me into the crowd and whispered "Weg, Willi, aber schnell!" I wegged! I must say some food was given or rather thrown from behind walls etc., by a good many Germans, one of whom made the remark, "Poor Germany-what have we come to". When the guard came tonight- he came to a silence not usually in camp these days- when we are so full

7 of joy what singing is the order of the day. He came shamefacedly in and looked at me(I am his favorite). I just said coldly as I could, "You must be proud of your wonderful Germany!" One car

7-continued

(one of the lads told me) stopped and gave ut bread and bacon--whereupon one of the S.S. came up at the double and threatened to shoot the soldier, who drew his revolver and gave the S.S. man two seconds to move off. Truthful to say, that the horrible sight has disgusted many Germans, but they are too afraid to say anything.

be an / 26th Feb
r in the /
y-prob i s 27 Jan. /

Temp 15°. Bright. More Jewesses in similar condition to yesterday. Stan comes to me after dinner and tells me a Jewess has got away and he has her hiding in cows crib. I suggest moving her to loft over camp. Plenty straw and the chimney from our fire will keep her warm. I arrange to take her to the camp. Wait till nearly dusk and go to Stan's farm, he hands over girl. I tell her to walk 5 paces near on other side of road and speak to no one. She is crippled, too frightened to understand me, grabs my arm. I am a bit windy as the Gerries will stop us as it is definite "crime" for prisoner to speak or walk with women. Have luck to

7-continued

cross roads where sentry is. Go straight up to him and ask him where the soldier who wants his wireless set repaired is. (They have asked me to call at the Farm on the crossroad to repair a wireless set- have so far dodged it.) Have luck.

8 He directs me to Dippe's farm. I call to the girl explaining she is Russian and lost her way- she is with "Fluchtlingen"! Now past the guards billet (the lads have arranged to draw Red X food

00? / at 6:10 and keep the guard busy till 6:30. No trouble at all! No refugees in yard-one of our own lads who has escaped from Marienburg and is now staying in our camp under the guise of being with a refugee family down the road- has had a good fire going all day and the brick chimney is hot. Hot water soap towel-old clothes, slacks food rushed up to her. One of the lads stays with

vies??/ horses (there are nine in the barn) and watches for civvies.

Take all clothing off kid, give haer parafin for lice in her hair

8-continued

and bid her goodbye. She grabs my hand and kisses it-and tries to ro? / thank me, calls me herr - I say roughly,-Drop it we are comrads, only doing what we can. Had no chance for a good look at her, judge her to be 25 years of age.

ikely- / 27th everyone brings in food for our escapee! Hundred weight peas-ducks, hens, best part of a pig. Bread by loaves-and believe me she's ate 3 loaves today and 5 bowls of soup- somewhere around 22 lb. of food. She's ill now- sick diarrhea. Suggest only milk for a few days.

26th sawn through bars of window and had girl in tonight. She is sixteen years of age. Comes from

9 Lithuania. been in various concentration camps-last being Stutthoff.. Been on the march for days. Told us-: we were about 400 Jewesses. We were marched to Stutthoff where most of our clothing

9-continued

was taken from us. We had one blanket between my mother, sister, and I. Our food was three potatoes a day-and at night we were put into barns and huddled together for warmth. Many have died on the way many have been murdered by clubbing or being shot. When we came to Stutthof we found much old clothing and in some shoes were bits of papers with messages- typical of which was-"I am the Jew R.S. from Wilno, I am today to be gassed". There were piles of shoes in the camp grounds and much clothing. An S.S. man gave me another blanket. We thought we have to be murdered but as the Russians advanced we moved on again. We have been on the move from Lithuania since last July. Today I could go no further. I said "Mother I am going to run away," my mother said "Child if you must, then do so-God watch over you". I ran away: but a german civilian

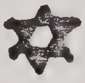
9-continued

caught me gave me bread and told me to join the column- I would have done so but the guard came running to hit me and I was afraid, so I ran behind some people who were watching our march through and God helped me to find the cowstable and I laid

10 / in the cow crib. I know God helped me, for shortly after Stan came to me and said to me"Don't move I am English- don't be afraid" English! I knew I was saved! (the last was said with such utter faith that I know, tho we were all ourselves prisoners-the Gerries weren't going to get her back)

We had a good look at her. Her eyes are large as is usual with starvation, sunken cheeks, no breasts. Hair has not been cut, body badly marked with sores caused by scratching lice bites. Head still a bit matted and lice still obviously in. I got my forefinger and thumb round the upper part of her arm easily.

10-continued

About 5'7" in height. Sonia is her name. Feet blue and raw with frostbite, the right heel is eaten away by frost and constant rubbing of badly fitting clog. We have stolen clothing and a pair of shoes off the refugee wagons to replace hers which is marked with the Jew star  in Red dye. "She sat till twelve making a new hat from material and sewing and talking. She will keep harping on her mother and sister and the concentration camp, but we forbid her to mention them. She says it is very lonely and the time passes so slowly in the daytime. We arrange for fellows to pop / in and out during the day. (Discipline is lose now everyone is apathetic and just waiting for the Russians to come!)

11 29th 5°C Sleet

Our escapee still eating fast . We don't expect to be evacuated now as all evacuees must stay put and go no further. evidently

11-continued

refugees are hampering troops.

30th We have been again discussing means of escape in case they try to move us. Most of us disbelieve the atrocity stories of the Russians, and urge many civilians to stay. Hitler pictures-S.S. signs-Nazie badges are all being destroyed. Only Nazi salute given on rare occassions-but all determined to fight on against the Russians.

31st Frau Schenke asked me to stay with her if Russians come and we must move. Her husband is Police officer. Funny thing the Russian workers here from Ukraine all terrified of Russian advance. Say they will all be killed. I scoff at all stories.. Say I do not believe my country would bind itself to such criminals.-

11-continued

and that it is just propaganda.

12 Feb. 1st 1945 Zonke called up to Volkssturm! I am ordered to stay by his wife and in the case of evacuation I am to go / with her (what _'o _ per)

2nd Russians still at Marienburg but I hear Elbing is taken. Many rumors but nothing concrete-

3rd Lovely life! No work, Zonkes wife treats me like a lord, worries because I don't eat much there. "Found a barrel of 95% schnapps watered down-Lovely! more food than ever. Plenty Smokes.

12-continued

4th Now openly visit where I want to. Polish friends, Russians etc. go to "work" 9- come back as I want weather mild snow away.

5th Cold again Heavy snow. Temp 10° 1st time no evacuees passed since Feb 3, wish we could get news.

6th Heavy bombing on Derschau (24 kilo)

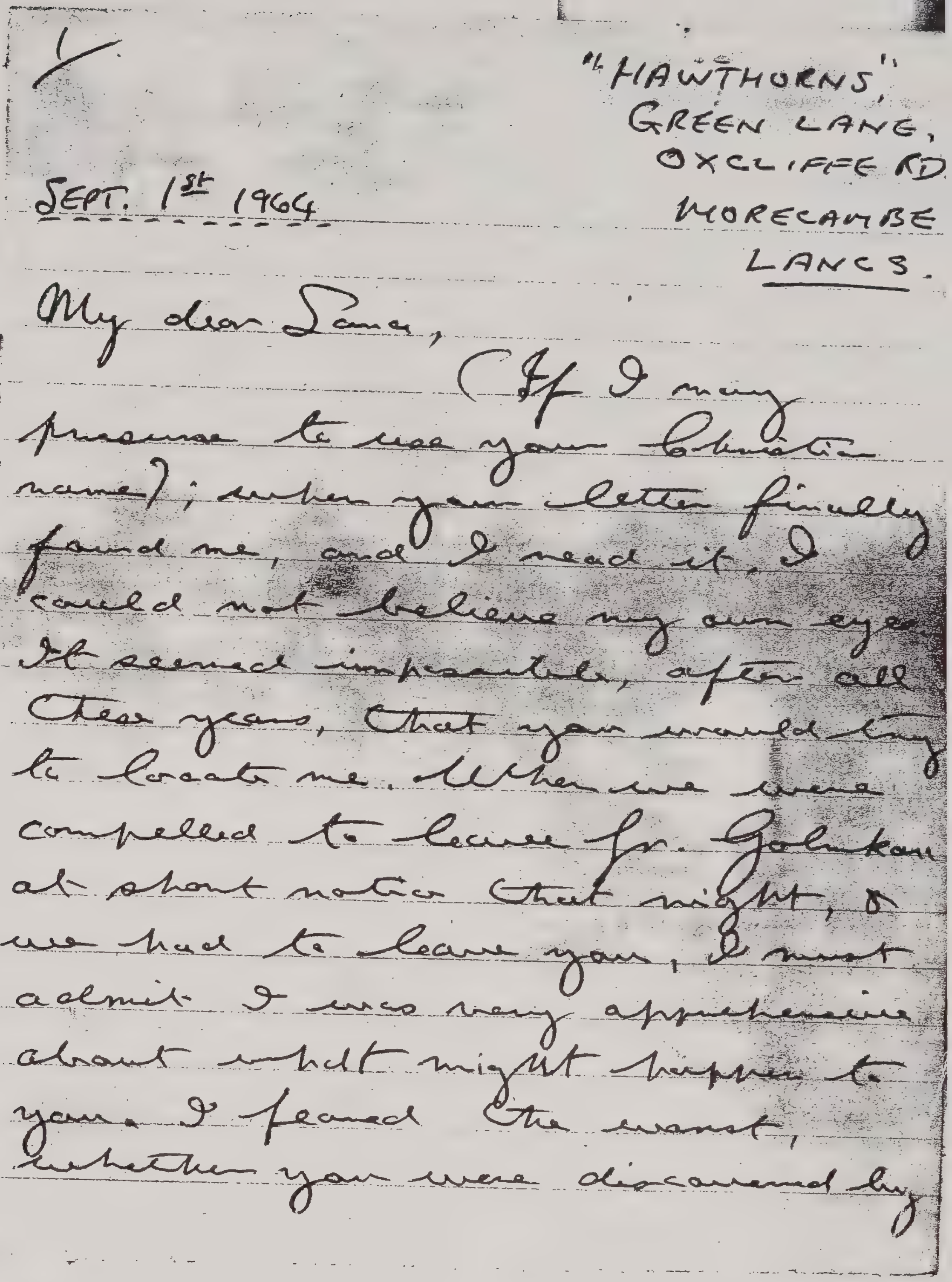
7th Chaps just arrived from Derschau say 8 Gerries are hanging from bridge with placards on them "Deserters". S.S. becoming active around here.

13 8th I've been damned queer today-bad cold and feet troubling me again from frost bite in 1940.

9th 2 P.M. Suddenly ordered to move off in two hours Stan escapes. I determined to escape but not here. Ask Jewess to follow us tonight and go through Russian lines, but she is too afraid leave her enough food for three weeks. Push off 8:30.

First letter from Allie

[redacted]



1/

"HAWTHORNS",
GREEN LANE,
OXCLIFFE RD.
MORECAMBE
LANCS.

SEPT. 1st 1964.

My dear Lama,

(If I may presume to use your Tibetan name); when your letter finally found me, and I read it, I could not believe my own eyes. It seemed impossible, after all these years, that you would try to locate me. When we were compelled to leave fr. Golukan at short notice that night, & we had to leave you, I must admit I was very apprehensive about what might happen to you. I feared the worst, whether you were discovered by

[redacted]

[redacted]

Germans or Russians. I am very, very relieved to know that you are alive & safe.) I am still in touch with three of the men who were in Golmkau at that time, we have often talked about you, & wondered what had happened to you. When you write to me, please tell me everything that happened after we left. I must know. I know how lonely, frightened & miserable you must have felt in your hiding-place above our camp, I only tried to be kind to you, & cheer you a little, please don't give me the credit for saving your life; although

[redacted]

[redacted]

I must admit I prayed for you that night we left, so maybe it helped a little.

About one week after we left you, four of us escaped from the Germans, & hid with a Polish family for nearly a month, when we were *liberated*? by Russian troops.

I was shot & wounded by the Russian police in July 1945, & spent nearly eight weeks in hospital. When I came out, the Polish family nursed me back to health, & later I married the youngest daughter, Wanda, we returned to England in November, 1945.

[redacted]

[redacted]

A lot seems to have happened in that time, nineteen years is a long time.

I am in the coin-slot & amusement machine business now, managing our arcades here in the summer season, designing & building machines during the winter. Well, I could go on writing for a long time yet, but I want to get this letter off to you, along with a photo of myself, If I can find a suitable one. I would like a photo of yourself, if you don't mind, when you answer this letter, a recent one if possible.

Once again, I would like to thank you for writing to me,

[redacted]

2

[redacted]

& when you write again please tell me all that has happened to you since I last saw you.

Sincerely yours,

A. Edwards

[redacted]

II Lette

September. 25th (1964)

"Hawthorn"
Green Lane,
Oxcliffe Road.
Morecambe,
Lancs.

My dear Lana,

I feel I must apologise for the delay in answering your letter, but I have been trying to trace some of the men who were in the Gross Golmkau camp at that time. One of them, Billy Lawton, I have been in touch with ever since we left Germany. My wife, mother & I went across into Yorkshire last week to see him. He read your letter, and was delighted to know that you are safe & well. We had often talked about you. I left him your address, so he may write to you sometime. I met Willy Fisher three years ago, but have not seen him since then, nor has he written.

But now I must thank you for your letter & photos, I was delighted

to receive them. I have shown them to many people I know. Looking at your latest photo, I note that you have become a very beautiful woman; I must admit I had almost forgotten what you looked like. The details & story of your survival are fantastic, almost unbelievable. That same night we were marched from the camp at Gölmkau, I did not have much time to make a decision, but I must confess to you that I often criticised myself for not staying behind with you, and wondered whether I had done the right thing. It was a great relief to receive your first letter & know that you were safe. It is strange, indeed, that you should have found shelter with Heinrich Binder; I worked on that farm for nearly a year, I also milked those cows. Binder was an old b.......d, a typical German, but no doubt he became scared as the Russians approached.

Whatever he was, or is, I feel grateful towards him for taking you in, giving you shelter, & keeping you secret. I also worked in the local bakery for some time, perhaps you remember it, there were two Russian girls there, Nadja & Katiusia, and a young boy, Tichon, perhaps you met them.

My wife, Wanda, is travelling to Poland on November 5th, to visit her friends & family, she intends to visit Galmkan district and see what changes have taken place. This will be the third time she has been to Poland since we came to England in 1945. I have never been back there since we were married. Twice I made arrangements to do so, & each time something happened to prevent it, so maybe it was meant to be that way. I really would like to see all the old places once more, I enjoy travelling, so perhaps next year I will make it. I had a holiday in Spain

last year, wonderful climate, very friendly people, it was on the Mediterranean coast, near Gibraltar.

Before I go any further, I must admit I am not a very good letter-writer; I find it much easier to talk to someone, so if I keep hopping from one subject to another, please excuse me.

When we were marched from Golenkau that night, we were taken to Danzig, to the British P.O.W. camp. There we had to sleep outside all night, then mustered together next morning, given some food rations, and about 2000 of us were marched westward toward Germany. We halted the first night at Kartuzy, a Polish town. We knew then that by the next night, we would be crossing the frontier into Germany, and then escape would be almost useless. So when we approached to within 10 Kilometers of Germany, (it was getting dark by this time, four of us decided to watch for

our chance, and slip off the column into the woods by the roadside. We pulled it off O.K, then rejoined, and made our way across country to the nearest Polish farmhouse. (It happened to belong to my wife's family). They took us in without question, & agreed to hide us in the barn until the Russians arrived, in spite of the fact that the S.S. were searching continuously for escaped prisoners. & threatening the Poles with death if they helped prisoners. We were there for three weeks before the Russians arrived, and we thought that was the end of our problems & troubles. How wrong we were!! We were taken back & forth, pushed from one village to the next one, & back again, interrogated, questioned, accused of being Germans in British uniforms. We escaped from them time after time, but they kept picking us up, & usually took us to the nearest police H.Q. At one of these police posts, I refused to answer any more questions,

got on my bicycle, & rode off. They shot me from behind, breaking the left [illegible] leg in two places. That put me out of circulation for nearly 6 weeks. I was in the Polish Hospital in Kartuzy. [illegible] Wanda & her family visited me regularly, and looked after me when I was discharged in late September. I married her in October, we travelled to Warsaw, contacted the newly established British Embassy, and after a few days, were flown back to England. I was discharged from the Army on account of the disability, and given a small pension. Wanda and I helped my parents in the bakery business for some time, after that I was operating my own taxi service for a number of years, giving driving lessons in-between busy times, did quite a bit of motor engineering, was in the ice-cream business for a while, & finally finished up in the automatic slot-machine business. It is very unlikely

that I shall ever make a fortune, but I enjoy designing & building new types of machines, & I suppose that is the important thing. My real ambition is to travel the world, but that will have to wait for a while.

My wife & I have no children, she cannot have them; but I will see if we have any good photos of ourselves, and put them in with this letter. I would like, very much, to see you again, Sara, there seems to be such a lot of things to talk about. Next year, maybe, I'll be able to arrange it, but I cannot make it a definite promise.

I must bring this to an end here, or I will never get it posted off to you; there seems to be such a lot to tell you about everything, it would take weeks to write it all down. Please write soon, tell me more about yourself & your adventures. In the meantime, I will obtain the addresses of some of the other men from

the Kalmukan camp, I shall write & tell them the news, and if you wish to have their addresses, I will give them to you, next letter.

All my best wishes to you and your family —

Yours sincerely,

Alan

1A

CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES NEWSPAPER FILE

SOURCE Johannesburg Sunday Times DATE May 26, 1968

Woman's 20-year search for rescuers

Soldiers saved her from death after Nazi march

SUNDAY TIMES Correspondent

LONDON, Saturday.

OR NEARLY 20 years Sara Rigler has been enjoying all the good things of life. She wears e best clothes and takes expensive holidays. But she sits in her elegant home, her mind goes back onstantly across two decades to a group of British diers who saved her from death at the hands of e Germans.

Since that time she has al- s wanted, to thank them d show her gratitude. But acing them has always been icult — particularly as she w lives in America.

he is former Royal Engin- driver, Alan Edwards, and a series of moving letters she asked him, "the first man show me kindness and com- ion after years of being eated as a nonentity to be des- ed, to visit her in New ork."

Said Mr. Edwards, who now runs a garage in Green Lane, orecambe: "When Sara's etter arrived I was flabber- asted. I never dreamed that nyone would take so much ime and trouble to find me."

he whole moving story began Stalag 20B prisoner of war p, Golmkau, Poland, in Feb- ary 1945.

Mr. Edwards, now 48, had arrived there after being captured by the Germans. Temperatures were well below freezing as he and his fellow prisoners worked on a farm near the camp.

Suddenly Mr. Edwards and a friend came across what they first thought to be a bundle of old rags in a ditch. "On looking closer, I realised that there was a human being there," recalled Mr. Edwards.

Left to die

"The Germans had been marching a column of about a thousand Jewish refugees past the camp to a concentration camp at Danzig. All the refugees were in a bad way and many were dropping out and being left to die."

The two men smuggled the refugee into a hayloft above their billet in the camp.

"It was only when we got our bundle there that we found we had rescued a girl," said Mr. Edwards. "She was in a terrible state, and her body was bruised and covered in sores. But she still managed to tell us her name, Sara, and that she was 17."

Tenderly, Alan Edwards and his friends cut away her clothing and soothed her wounds with ointment. She was so appealing that everyone agreed to hide her in the hayloft for as long as possible.

"The bigest danger was that a farmer might clear the hay while we were out working," said Mr. Edwards. "As we had to leave her through the day we just kept our fingers crossed."

Then, early one morning, about three weeks after her arrival, the prisoners were ordered to dress immediately for a march to a camp in Germany. "We didn't even get a chance to warn Sara because we were on the march before dawn," said Alan.

After two days marching Alan escaped from his column and took shelter with a Polish family. While with them he met a Polish girl who became his wife.

Escaped

"I was much too concerned about my own safety at that time to worry about Sara, although I've often wondered about what happened to her," he said.

Sara did, in fact, escape from the hayloft, and after various adventures, during which she learned her mother and sister had died at the Germans' hands, she joined an uncle in Brooklyn, New York, trained as a nurse and met her husband, William, now a successful lawyer.

After her marriage, Sara got down in earnest to tracing her helpers. But because she did not have the men's service numbers the British War Records Centre found it difficult to help.

At her home in New York, Mrs. Rigler now 40, and the mother of two children, said: "The only full name I knew was Alan Edwards's. He was very kind, and I got the impression that his parents had a bakery business in London.

London meeting

"Through an English friend, I wrote to every Edwards in the telephone directory, but with no luck. Eventually, however, after many disappointments, the war records office managed to get a lead and got in touch with Alan.

"Since then, he's put me in touch with Bill Scruton, from Ripon, Yorkshire, and a Mr. Hambling, of Stourport-on-Severn, Worcester."

Returning recently to America from a holiday in Israel, Mrs. Rigler managed a 20-minute meeting with Mr. Edwards at London Airport and repeated her invitation for him to visit her. Will he take up the offer? "I'd love to go and, perhaps, I will one day."

LEFT, wealthy Sara Rigler, "a bundle of rags" when found. ABOVE, Alan Edwards . . . "flabbergasted" at being invited to visit the U.S.

Local Flatbush Times

May 21, 1972

PRISON PHOTO: This old picture of the 10 POWs was taken ~~after~~ BEFORE they were freed at the end of World War 2.

Girl Saved by 10 British POWs in World War 2 Tracks Them Down for Reunion to Say 'Thank You'

It was a reunion touched with pathos — a London reunion after 27 years between the once-little Jewish girl and the British prisoners of war who hid her inside a German POW camp and nursed her to health.

Mrs. William (Sara) Rigler, 43-year-old wife of a New York City Family Court judge, owed her life to the 10 British soldiers and finally returned to say "thank you." The reunion was held in a hotel last February.

In 1945, Sara was a 16-year-old waif being marched off with her mother and sister to a Nazi extermination camp. She managed to escape from the death march and hide in a ditch in Polish farm country where the British POWs were working. They smuggled her that night into their prisoner camp, Stalag 20B, and hid her in the loft of their wooden hut for nearly 3 months, until advancing Russian troops freed her.

"It was a long-term ambition to see them all again," Mrs. Rigler said. "I didn't know where they lived, so I wrote to the War Office in London," which traced them down for her.

Ex-POW Bert Hambling said: "It was such a moving moment to see her. There were tears in all our eyes."

REUNION PHOTO: Sara Rigler is shown with, from left, Stan Walls, Jack Noble, George Hammond, Bill Keeble, and in the back row, Jack Buckley, Roger Latchford, Bill Scruton, Bert Hambling and Bill Fisher. Allen Edwards, the tenth man, arrived after the picture was taken.

Hannah Rigler: A Survivor Remembers

By SHERYL MECCARIELLO

Fortune is a cruel sister.

After five years of horror in a German concentration camp, Hannah Rigler was rescued only to discover she was the single remaining member of her family.

She was young, in her teens. If things had been different, she might have been entering medical school. Hannah laughs at that. There had been no boys in her family so she always told her father she would become a doctor, "to continue the family name," she told him.

But these aspirations of youth were not to be. The Manusco family endured a suffering so great that only Hannah survived to remember. And unlike many survivors, who found peace only in forgetting, Hannah chose to remember.

Hannah, who came to the United States in 1947, speaks lightly, swiftly, in a slight Lithuanian accent that some mistake for Israeli. "We (survivors) each have our own philosophy," she told a visitor recently in her comfortable apartment on Albemarle Road. "It is hard when no one in your family survives but you. You think, 'What am I going to do with my life, because when I'm gone that's it. I decided I'm here, now I must see to it that the people who are dead are not forgotten."

So, born Sarah, she took her sister's name, Hannah. Hannah pointed to one of the many paintings and drawings that crowded her living room walls. The girl who cradled her chin in her hands was her sister. And knowing the scope of her loss was far more than personal, Hannah joined the Center for Holocaust Studies.

Paying Dues

"I have many fights with my friends," she confessed. "They cannot understand why I got involved with the center. They say, 'You have paid your dues, forget it.' Many of them are survivors, like myself, and most of them are, thank God, doing very nicely. But I feel differently.

"They can say, 'I have paid my dues, I have done my share,' "Hannah continued, breaking her even tone. "They have done for themselves, but what about those who are not here to say, 'I have done my share?" ①

② To cope with the unwieldy memories, Hannah plunged into fervent activity. After graduating from the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital School of Nursing, she married William Rigler, now a Family Court judge. From the time she graduated until the birth of her first child, Lionel, she worked as a nurse.

Then came her involvement in politics. It began with the Reform Democrats in the fifties and included a term as Democratic state committeewoman. "But mainly, I have been doing my schtick in the neighborhood," Hannah said. "This is my forte. I got involved with the Brooklyn Coalition for Soviet Jewry, getting people together, getting immigrants jobs. I love helping people." Whether

HANNAH RIGLER

The Happy Nurse

③ "They used to call me the Happy Nurse," she laughed. But as quickly as the laughter came, a cloud passed over her face and she added, "They never knew what was underneath. My motto is, 'When you smile, the world smiles with you, When you cry, you cry alone.' "

During the war, the Russians were the first to invade Lithuania. Hannah's father, who was an ordained but not a practicing rabbi, owned a leather factory and was something of a community leader. He was one of the first victims.

"They put him in jail for being a bourgeoisie," she recalled. He was released after six months, but the imprisonment was only the beginning of their misfortunes.

A year later, the Germans overran Lithuania as the Russians evacuated. "We had a chance to flee but we didn't," Hannah said. "My father said, 'What are we running from, fire and water? After all, the Germans are more educated than the Russians and things will be better under them.'" History proved that this would not be the case.

"The Germans came on a Sunday and my father was gone on Thursday," she remembered, eyes welling with tears. "It was awful. You would go to sleep at night and the train would come and take you away. We went to bed with our bags packed every night, expecting to be taken away. The greeting in the ghetto became, not 'Hello', but, 'As long as we see each other.'"

These recollections do not come easily to Hannah. A tear lurking behind each dazzling smile, she continued.

"When I first came here, I stayed with an uncle in the country in Bushville, Pennsylvania. Everyone, and I mean everyone, gave me a box of candy as a welcoming present. Well, we didn't have any food in the ghetto or the camp so I was constantly hungry. I used to go to bed with a box of candy every night. Then, when Labor Day came, my aunt planned a party. She suggested I bring a box to the party so it wouldn't spoil. I said, 'Aunt what candy?' "

Hannah's Hunger

The hunger never really left her. But it became hunger for people ("I like to say friends are my hobby, I collect them"), and now that children, Gail, 19, and Lionel, 21, are both away at school, she is gratifying her hunger for knowledge. The 47-year-old survivor is enrolled in Brooklyn College's special Bachelor of Arts program.

Hannah sat in the glow of filtered sunlight, eyes moist, and thoughtfully considered her past.

"I had a little incident with my aunt," she said. "My aunt asked me if it was really so bad in the camps. I said, 'Tanta, who is alive? I am the only one who survived from the whole family.'"

"The cruelty that the Germans displayed wasn't even human," she sighed. "I don't know what dehumanizes. Now I saw how the Jews were dehumanized, but this was a process because when you are hungry you'll do almost anything and eat almost anything. You'll do things you never believed were possible.

"But if someone says, 'Take a baby and kill it against the wall,' you don't do it if you're human," she said angrily. "And the Germans didn't do it to just one.

"The mind can not comprehend it," she confessed. "So I crowd my life. But there must be a method to my madness, I mean why I'm doing all of this. I really feel that as a survivor one of my things is to speak for the people who are not here, because even now in Germany, they say, 'Oh, I don't think it was six million, I think it was a million.'"

Re-Elect

Hannah Rigler

State Committeewoman

a Fighter for Soviet Jewry

Flatbush Life December 23, 1973

'Let My People Go' Rally at Boro Hall:

Several hundred women gathered on the steps of Brooklyn Borough Hall Mon., Dec. 11, to send a message to the Soviet Union; the message: "Let my people go."

Wearing white flowers in their lapels and bearing signs such as "Silent no more" and "Support the Jackson amendment," they listened to speeches by Borough President Sebastian Leone, Brooklyn District Attorney Eugene Gold and religious leaders.

Held on the 25th Human Rights Day, the rally had a specific goal in mind, that of showing support for the so-called Jackson amendment. Sponsored by Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), the proposal basically would deny trade privileges to any country that does not allow free emigration to its citizens. The bill is specifically designed to put pressure on the Soviet Union to ease its emigration policies.

Chairwoman of the rally Hannah Rigler recalled her own days of oppression in Russia, stating, "I might see my friends and family at night, but who knew if I would see them again in the morning."

BOROUGH PRESIDENT Sebastian Leone recently announced Brooklyn's solidarity with the cause of Soviet Jewry and wholeheartedly endorsed the rally which took place recently at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. He is joined by Father Robert Kennedy, of the Catholic-Jewish Relations Committee of the Brooklyn Diocese, and Mrs. Hannah Rigler of the Brooklyn Coalition for Soviet Jewry.

When People Needed Them They Were There!

Re-Elect **Hannah Rigler**
State Committeewoman

Re-Elect Assemblyman
Mel Miller

Elect **Julius Venner**
State Committeeman

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY SEPT. 10

Committee to Re-elect Hannah Rigler 1702 Church Avenue

May 28, 1972
Sunday NEW YORK NEWS
Coloroto Magazine

'Thank you for being alive'

In another war, Mrs. Sara Rigler was in a concentration camp—and on this Memorial Day, she, too, remembers

PICTORIAL PARADE PHOTO

POWs at Stalag 20B in Poland, where 10 British soldiers hid a Jewish girl who escaped from a "destruction camp."

It was a reunion touched with pathos — a London reunion after 27 years between the once-little Jewish girl and the British prisoners of war who hid her inside a German POW camp and nursed her to health.

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Re-elect

Hannah (Sara) Rigler

State Committeewoman

ENDORSED BY CONGRESSWOMAN ELIZABETH HOLTZMAN
STATE SENATOR CAROL BELLAMY

"COURAGE TO FIGHT, WISDOM TO LEAD"

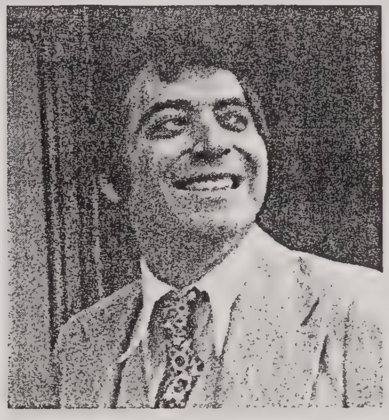
DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

SEPT. 10 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

A United Democratic Party
o Serve our Community

WE CANNOT PERMIT INTRA-PARTY WARFARE TO SPLIT OUR LOCAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND WEAKEN OUR COMMUNITY'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH ITS MANY PRESSING PROBLEMS. WE NEED UNITED AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE . . . .

Re-Elect
mel
MILLER
Assemblyman



ect
ulius
VENNER
State
Committeeman

Re-Elect
hannah
RIGLER
State
Committeewoman

Democratic Primary

Tuesday, September 10, 1974

6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR THE 44th AD — 33 CROOKE AVE., BROOKLYN, N.Y. tel.: 287-0445

Re-Elect
hannah **RIGLER** State Committeewoman

July, 1974

Dear Friend,

I have been fortunate to enjoy your support in past campaigns. Now I must ask for your help again.

As you may know, the 44th Assembly District has been reshaped by a callous Republican gerrymander. Our district now includes a section of Crown Heights and a few more blocks of Park Slope, along with its major part in Flatbush.

My running mates and I face a very difficult primary. Political campaigns are expensive and time consuming. They require money and people. We need both. I hope that you will support me now, as you have in the past, and help me to wage a strong and vigorous campaign. Your help can make the difference in the Primary on September 10.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Hannah Rigler

Hannah Rigler

Democratic Primary
September 10

Democratic Primary
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1974
6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

GRANDCHILDREN

MATHEW

DANIELLE